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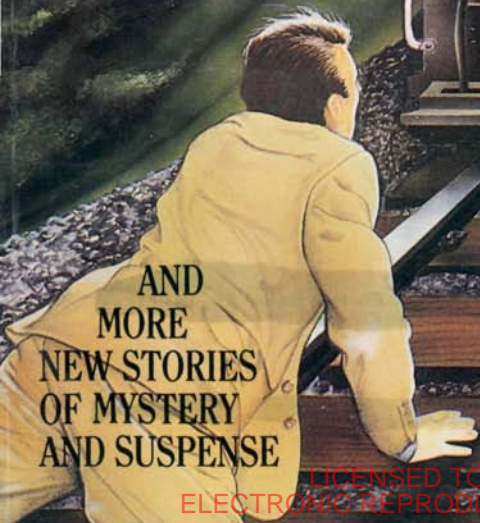
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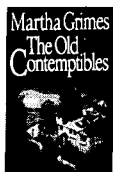
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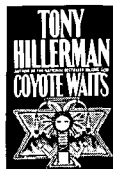
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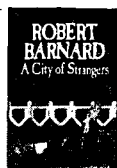
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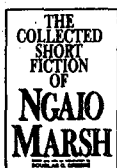
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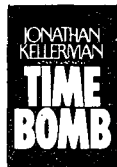
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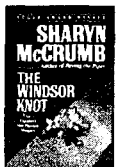
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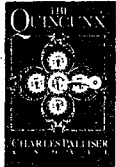
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**I**n our February issue, author P. J. Doyle, in a Guest Editorial, gave us an account of Bouchercon XXI, held last fall in London. If you thought the convention sounded like fun, you might want to make plans to attend Bouchercon XXII—and it's not at all too soon to get your reservation in.

The Bouchercons, for those of you who have just joined us or who aren't otherwise familiar with the mystery convention scene, are annual gatherings of mystery fans and authors, with some editors and agents in attendance as well. They are called Bouchercons in honor of Anthony Boucher (whose real name was William White), longtime mystery reviewer for the *New York Times* and himself author

of mystery novels and short stories. He died in 1968; the first Bouchercon was held in 1970.

The convention returns to this country in 1991. It will be held in Pasadena, California, on October 11, 12, and 13, at the Pasadena Hilton Hotel. Membership in the convention is \$50; there will probably be special room rates at the hotel for convention-goers. For further information, write to:

Bobbi Armbruster, Treasurer  
Bouchercon XXII  
2334 Beach Avenue  
Venice, California 90291

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(continued on page 79)

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MPA

FICTION

# It Was a Warm and Muggy Night

by Robert Halsted



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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**I**t was a warm and muggy night.

This was perfectly okay with me. The faint breeze off the Gulf barely reached my studio, so I had enough paddle-fan on to keep myself from sticking to the rush job on my drawing board. I was wearing a shower-kiltie, but mostly for the sake of chastity.

The sometimes stormy emotional intensity of our first couple of months together was quiescent, and Millie and I were for a while in a humdrum domestic routine that felt pretty good after the inner and outer stresses we'd been through.

I don't know what the normal cycle is, if there is one. My first marriage—and ours isn't a second one at this time, though we're now officially *living together*—started out in overdrive with rosy glows and movie-pitcher hyperbole, downshifted to boredom and ennui, and backed up into destructive infighting. Since then, excluding a couple of brief abortive experiments, I'd been basically alone. Solitude is better than misery by far. I was determined not to repeat that fiasco.

I do know that things with Millie had felt right all along. We'd forced nothing, rather had held back. We loved before we fell in love, fell in love before

we fell in bed. We'd been, for this day and age, chastely traditional.

While there was more excitement up ahead—Millie had some unfinished personal business to work through, sooner or later—for now our soap opera was more a sitcom, and we were enjoying it as it came.

"How about ramen?" came Millie's voice from the kitchen.

"Two cups, three minutes. Or read the package."

"No, I mean how about you?"

"Yes. Four cups, three minutes. You might sliver up the pork chop from yesterday, and I think there's some scallions left."

Millie, the light of my life, has a lot of things going for her, but Cordon Bleu she ain't. At least not yet.

"I'm not *totally* inept and stupid, Walt. Still only three minutes?"

Avoiding the opportunity for a long discourse, I assured her three was right. I once knew a lady psychologist who boiled four pounds of shrimp for an hour because the recipe said boil one pound for fifteen minutes. The correct figure is about ninety seconds.

In less than half an hour she had the three-minute noodles ready. I stuck my brushes in the cup and toddled down to the dining area, which from day to

day under Millie's management roves from northern kitchen to southernmost screenporch. The ramen were in the porcelain bowls I kept sacrosanct on the shelf till Millie moved in, and Sam was polishing the pork chop bone on his mat beside the table.

"Looks good, darling, I have to admit. The marigold leaf is a nice touch."

"Oh. I thought that was parsley."

"Equivalent enough, in Oriental cuisine, though—" I slurped a tentative spoonful of broth "—My God, what have you *done* to me!"

"Oh, gee, I guess I overdid it—it is a little strong, isn't it? But you liked that hot-and-sour stuff at the Golden Dragon so well I thought if I added some key-lime juice and a little of your red sauce—"

"A *little*!" Tears were running out of my eyes, nose, and mouth. And I saw she was getting wet around the eyes, but not from the pepper sauce. I'd already hurt her feelings four times in three days, since I'd been too busy to cook. Bravely, I gritted my teeth, resumed eating (neat trick), and tried to enjoy it. Tact, masochism, the primitive beginnings of compassion—whatever my motivation, she'd suffered enough, it was my turn now. I actually

began to enjoy it and was trying to catch my breath to tell her so when I saw her looking past me.

"What's that?" she asked, pointing with her eyes.

I looked over my shoulder and there, a few hundred yards offshore, was a fair-sized powerboat idling along, sweeping a spotlight across the water.

"Probably the Coast Guard or DEA trolling for square grouper." Realizing I'd set myself up for another nice long who's-on-first, I amended: "You know, bales of contraband. They cruise or fly in, then swim till somebody nets them and takes 'em to market."

Her eyes and mouth widened with that look of insight I'd learned to recognize. "I *thought* it was funny he was so far offshore and didn't stink."

"Huh? I mean who?"

"The DC mosquito thing. They weren't flying over the mangroves, they were over the bay, and there wasn't that nasty oily smell afterwards. And there was only one of them instead of three or four. But you should've said 'mullet.'"

"?"

"Nobody smokes grouper."

That shut me up for a while. I'd learned to like the strange dish by the time it was gone, and finally got around to telling her so.



Later in the evening we were distracted again, this time by the sound of a heavy car stalled in sugar-sand, digging itself in deeper and deeper.

I didn't like so much traffic by the door of our desert isle. I tried to ignore it, but Millie thought I ought to go see if they needed help. I allowed as how they might be somebody who'd rather do it themselves. Nobody local would be bogged down at that particular time and place. That left Feds, smugglers, or a foolish tourist. If the latter, they could see the light and politely knock on the door for help. The sand road goes out almost to the point on the sound side; we're on the bay side facing the Gulf, sheltered from the road by a row of Indian mounds, not invisible, but private, and we have one of the few real beaches on all of Live Oak Key, which is really a fair-sized in-shore island.

But my conscience got to bothering me—I could see a Lincoln full of lost little old ladies from Ohio slowly going anemic from salt-marsh skeeters or dying of terror lest a shark come ashore and attack them—so I moseyed quietly out the shell driveway till I had them in sight. There was no moon to speak of, but by the vehicle's reflected headlights I could see it was a fancy van,

maroon with a lot of chrome and custom stripes, down to its rocker panel in the soft sand. I heard voices but couldn't see anyone.

Keeping some bush between them and me, in case they weren't friendly, I called out: "Ahoy, the van! You need some help?"

They weren't friendly. Before I had time to worry about it, somebody fired off a couple of rounds in about a size thirty-eight. I heard one of the slugs rattle a cabbage frond a few yards from me, so I quietly tippy-toed back the way I came. Mine is not a heroic, swash-buckling temperament.

The little idiot was, of course, stumbling and skipping barefoot through the dark trying to rescue me. It was all I could do to keep her quiet till we got back to the house.

We turned off all the lights and I groped for the phone dial. I punched what I hoped was a zero, and when the operator came on asked her for the sheriff's office. We didn't have 911 yet.

With surprisingly little bureaucracy I got hold of a desk person who listened courteously.

"This is Walter Martin, M-A-R-T-I-N, I'm at the south end of Live Oak Key, there's a van stuck in the sand right at Mound

Point. There may be a drug connection. I'll explain that later. Oh, yes, they tried to shoot me. We're indoors with the lights off right now. I'll flag your car when it shows up."

There was a car already on the island. It was only five or six minutes before I heard an overpowered V-8 being skillfully driven, hell-on-possums, too fast down the main drag. When I heard him leave the blacktop and slow down for the shell, I went out to meet him and waved him down at the mouth of the driveway. The near deputy rolled his window down, and I pointed down the way.

"Just this side of the point, in a fancy van. They took a couple of potshots at me." The car vroomed on down, spotlights on, and I followed on foot. The birds had flown by then, of course, but the deputies found the van interesting enough. I told them I was worried about Millie and would they come to the house if they wanted to hear my story.

More vehicles came. It was an hour or so before anyone showed up at the house, and it was a pair of detectives, not road deputies. While two other cars and a tow truck worked at the point, and a deputy shouted and fired one time at someone who turned out not to be there,

the detectives interviewed us over a pot of coffee. (It nearly killed us both, but Millie has learned to brew a perfect pot.) The paperwork was minimal, and the deputies looked like they knew what they were doing. We have some dumb ones, some roughnecks, and some damn good ones.

By the time it was all over, we were tired and sweaty and it was too late to get back to the drawing board, so we had a quick shower and a long slow bedtime. After latching all the screens.

**N**ext morning, pleasantly unwound, I rose with the sun, leaving Millie stretching and curling, more feline than Sam, on top of the covers. Sam followed me to the kitchen and we had a simple bachelor breakfast together, then I got right up to the studio with what was left in the coffee carafe. Caffeine gives my draftsmanship that fine tremolo line that makes my drawings so popular.

By the time the sun was in full heat, I'd finished the roughs for the job, a series of covers for a line of cheap paperback Gothics. Had I a little less versatility, I probably would have been a finer artist, but when I speak the language, I speak the language: wide-eyed terror, plenty

of cleavage, and one lighted window in the tower. More than once I've used the Big House next door as a model. The girls I do from imagination, though I've plagiarized a line or two from Millie since she settled in. Most of them are skinny brunettes. I had finally talked the art editor of the house, who is also office manager and a certifiably incompetent proof-reader, into telling me whether haunted Victorian or Old-World château, and what color hair. I never see the scripts, thank God.

I lined up the roughs ready for color and final line work and went downstairs for a break.

Millie was making noises in the kitchen, wearing the apron I'd insisted on lest she disfigure herself. As I watched her delightful pink bottom wiggle I went through the whole spectrum of responses she incites in me: lust, tenderness, puzzlement, fear. Where did she come from? Will she drop out of my life as suddenly as she dropped in? Is she idiot, madwoman, or genius? Actually, I know most of the answers by now, or major parts of them, but guessing keeps me young. I thought of creeping up behind her and stealing a caress, but there was a job to get out so I just stood admiring the view.

"Are we sure they're gone?"

she asked. Maybe she had a mirror palmed (or Holmes's well-polished teapot before her), possibly I'd made a slight noise, but I think she's just psychic.

"Surely they wouldn't still be around. Those cops beat a lot of bush last night."

"Maybe they left in their submarine."

Well, the girl had a point there. There's one road the length of the island and one bridge off. Without a boat, you're up the creek. Easier to hide in the neighborhood than to stay invisible while sneaking out. I didn't like the thought. "I suppose I'd better check around. Meanwhile, put on some clothes. I'm damned if I want a bunch of drugrunners tom-peeping my girl."

"Yes, Daddy," she replied with no humility whatsoever, and within about thirty seconds she had gone to the bedroom and reappeared in a shift that would have been demure on a normal woman. I enjoy her fast changes.

I circumambulated the cottage and saw nothing identifiable as alien footprints—some obvious cop-tracks, some of our barefoot ones. I went up to the Big House and saw no particular evidence of forced entry—all the windows had been jimmied at one time or another over the years; and I've used a putty knife as often as a key to

get past the old Yale spring latch on the front door, but none of the scars looked particularly fresh.

I entered with some trepidation. Less because I thought a smuggler was lurking with intent to crush me than because the B. H. has never been exorcised, and the Indian bones under it are not at peace. Nor possibly some white folks since, for all I know.

The dust was basically undisturbed. I heard a wood rat or a possum scuttling in the ceiling, the drumming gallop of a big-footed banana spider on the wall, wind clattering the palm fronds and sighing the Australian pines outdoors. If there were any outlaws, they didn't speak. I prowled around a bit and left.

Back at the cottage Millie had a light elevensy snack ready. She's fairly harmless with things like baloney on whole wheat since I hid the mayonnaise, and she remembers lettuce and pickles, which I don't often bother with. She even slices them diagonally.

I wolfed the food and went back to the studio. Working fast in mixed media—a combination of Magic Marker and thin acrylic wash creates a garish effect the junk publications adore—I had the half-dozen pieces colored in and ready for

final inking, as soon as they were dry enough, before twelve. A few minutes with a Pentel, sticking in eyelashes and the occasional wrought-iron balcony, and they'd be ready for spraying, packing, and shipping. I spray them because editors put coffee cups down on anything.

I sensed Millie behind me—this psychic stuff works both ways—a moment before she spoke. For all her casual ways, she treats my workspace and time with courtesy and caution.

"Ooh, dirty peechers! How do they keep them from bouncing out of their camisoles when they run?"

"Trade secret, known to only a few of the privileged. They tape 'em in. And they're actually made out of Styrofoam and marshmallow topping. How about a feast to celebrate another successful completion? We can stop at the 14-Wheeler when I go to mail it."

She frowned and made a small *moue*. "I suppose I *could* take a brief respite from my demanding domestic duties. Actually, I need to get away. All those smugglers in the mangroves are giving me the creeps. Should I wear a bra?"

"There's truckdrivers."

"I'll find my heirloom whalebone corset."

I sort of wanted to get away,



too. For the second time since I'd lived there, we locked up. Little did we know, as they used to say. Usually at times like this I ask advice from Jim Pier-son, but the *Mary Jo* was out for a week's shrimping, leaving us without our crime consultant. Life would've been simpler if he'd been in port.

It's nearly ten miles to the big post office in North Palm City, and since I had to express the package, we couldn't use the little island branch. The semi jockey stared enough to flatter but not insult, and we had the kind of meal you can only get at an old fashioned Southern truck stop. Someone once called the 14-Wheeler "The Restaurant That Time Forgot"—circa 1947, it had been the latest thing in aluminum-and-Formica diners—but the mullet, okra, cornbread, and mustard greens are three-star fare as the genre goes. I don't know what they fry the mullet in, but it isn't soybean oil.

When we got back around three, I had a misgiving in the pit of my stomach. No cues, just a hunch.

Sure enough, the screen on the porch door was slashed and glass louvers broken on the main door. The porch door hadn't been latched, but they didn't let that keep it from stopping them.

Indoors was a shambles—the utterly biggest damn mess I ever saw in an inhabited house. I swore. Millie swore too, in between sobs of hurt and anger. She'd converted my bachelor shack into a far, far nobler thing, and now it was total ruin.

I called the sheriff's office again. They sounded like they were getting sort of tired of me, but promised they'd send a car out. We started cleaning up, avoiding anything that looked like a clue, and by the time the detective was finished it was suppertime. Sam came slinking in, looking spooked, after the scene quieted down, and Millie stopped worrying about him.

There was less breakage than we'd feared, mostly just a lot of scattering. The mattress had been pulled off but not slashed, the toilet-tank lid removed but unbroken. By dark the place wasn't much worse than when I lived there alone. The studio was a nightmare, but not much of dollar value was damaged.

Bone-tired, I looked at charmingly, pathetically dirty Millie, cobwebs on her Aunt Jemima kerchief.

"I say, old girl, how about—"

"Oh, not tonight, John, I have a headache and my—"

I clapped my hand over her mouth. "—How about," I continued, "letting me take you

away from all this? The Burger Bar, or even—wow!—the Dixie Pig, and then the bridal suite at the North Trail, by-day-week-or-month-efficiencies, *Mo-tel*?”

Another of her myriad facets revealed itself to me: snapping eyes, hard tight lips. The seductive pout looked as if it'd never been there. “They're not chasing me out of my own home, Walt.”

At that critical moment I listened with my heart instead of my head. Her own home, *my* place. A very belonging kind of feeling. I stupidly agreed, telling myself that they'd looked all they could look and wouldn't bother us any more. We instituted some half-baked safeguards like stacking things at the doors with pots and pans on top as a crude alarm system.

We scrubbed each other—I've almost forgotten how to shower alone—and naturally one thing led to another and we whiled away our time and energy in youthful folly. She supplied the youth, and I furnished the folly.

In a lucid moment I'd had sense enough to dig my little Saturday night special from the hidey-hole where I protect kids from it. If a visiting child can't find a hidden object, a professional burglar or searching cop certainly can't. I put it into the pocket of a terry robe hung on the corner of the headboard.

Have I already said “little did we know”? Well, we oughta known better this time. Two people can live as feeble-minded as one. Innumerable clichés come to mind to describe the ridiculous ease with which we set ourselves up.

We were warm and snugly and happy together and nestled like two spoons in a drawer. How long we'd been asleep I don't know, but a sudden glare and a harsh voice brought me back from worlds away.

The ceiling light was on and a character was standing in the doorway. Most of him was in shadow, but the bright chrome-work of an expensive pistol—it looked about the same size as the one at the point sounded—glinted in the glare. I later figured three ways we forgot to keep him from getting in.

“Get up,” the voice was saying. “Get up and get it for me.”

I had to find my tongue and my brain and put them together before I could answer. Since I couldn't think of anything very clever to say I croaked: “Get what?”

“Get up. You too, sister.”

Some little corner of my brain must have been working. Before I had time to think up something dumb and useless to say, I intelligently blurted out, “Cover yourself up, honey. The robe's on my side.”

It worked. He hardly blinked an eye when she pretended a modesty that, to me, seemed unnatural. For a moment I was scared the gun would fall out of the robe and it would all hit the fan, but I knew she wasn't loony enough to mention finding hardware in the pockets, and I just had to hope she wasn't loony enough to try using it herself and get one of my favorite people insolubly riddled.

For my own part, I was attired in pure birthday suit, and in any social confrontation that puts you at a disadvantage.

He encouraged us by word and gesture, for reasons not clear to me, to go sit in the dining chairs. Lacking a better alternative, we followed his instructions with care. When we were a little slow and clumsy moving past him in the hallway, he looked for a moment as if he was ready to start shooting, and I realized he wasn't acting much more rationally than we were. Or than I was—I have no idea how rational Millie was at that moment.

By moving us, he'd lost some of his advantage in visibility. Between the bedroom light and the fluorescent over the stove in the kitchen, we were about equally illuminated, and I could get a pretty good view of him.

He looked like a regulation Yuppie who'd had a hard night.

His real silk polo shirt under the now tattered casual jacket had cost him a bundle, as had the rest of his wardrobe. I'm not sure what a Gucci loafer looks like—for more exalted occasions, I usually wear canvas deck shoes—but he had on something in that price range.

There was too much gold chain around his neck. I'd have enjoyed twisting it. He seemed to be all around a person with a lot of money who'd spent a day and a night in a mangrove swamp. His hair was a mess—all the glaze must've melted in the humidity—and his eyes looked crazy as well as tired.

He could've been Cuban or Colombian, a Mafioso or a dark Wasp. His jaw was dark with stubble, and his face was covered with red welts from insect bites. It gave me pleasure to know he was allergic to salt-marsh mosquitoes.

I heard Millie giggling, and I knew the same thought had hit her at the same time: with the mean look on his face and all the red spots, he looked like a teenage punk with a bad case of zits. I tried to maintain a serious demeanor, but it was hopeless. We do that to each other. I started giggling, too, and we couldn't stop till he laid his designer pistol alongside my cheek, without gentleness. I could feel the blood trickling

down, and I felt an awful fear that Millie would do something dumb to protect me. She has some instincts that are between mother housecat and unvarnished tigress. Fortunately, she kept her cool.

The guy moved in close, trying to decide whether to shove the barrel into my eye or up my nostril. After a small panic reaction, I realized he was shaking badly. "Give," he growled, his voice near breaking.

Sometimes, when terror and confusion are running roughshod over you, you stop trying to deal with them on their own terms and become calm and rational. This was not an act of particular courage or intelligence on my part, just a fatigued last resort. It hit me now.

"My dear sir, I would be glad to give if you'd tell me what you want me to give."

"Where did you PUT it?" His voice was almost out of control. The teenage image came back, this time a choirboy shifting from alto to baritone. If I could stay cool long enough to see what was riding him, I might be able to manipulate him. On the other hand, if he lost control first, we were no longer up the creek, we were at the bottom of it.

"Tell me what you're looking for and I'll tell you what I know

about it. If you're looking for dope, I reckon the deputies got everything that floated in."

"Never mind the dope. Where's the effing money?"

"Friend, the last money I saw was a small check from one of my customers week before last. If you think I have some of yours, you're wasting your time."

He hit me again, same gun barrel, same place. It hurt this time, and my affection for the rascal was getting less and less all the time.

Then Millie started giggling again, and I was sure she was hysterical if she hadn't been before till I saw the little trickle of snot building up on his mustache. He'd been sniffing all along, and I finally realized all at once that we were dealing with a pretty far-gone coke-head.

His runny nose gave me a far-out idea: I began sniffing myself, and so of course did Millie. My vague plan was to build up to a sneeze, pretend to reach for a tissue in the pocket of the robe and fire at him through the pocket. This could've been homicidal as well as suicidal. I realized, thinking of it afterward in a cold sweat, that it would have put Millie at a lot more hazard than I had in mind.

But Fate saved us both from my potential folly. There was



a scuffling sound in the kitchen, and Millie shrieked, "Sammy! Go back!" Coke-head swung around and blindly fired off a couple of rounds. There was a shrill cry, Millie screamed, and I was so mad at the son of a bitch for shooting our cat that I was airborne from a sitting start before I knew what I was doing.

I knocked him sprawling, with me on top, and before either of us could move Millie clobbered the bejaysus out of him with the champagne-bottle flower vase off the dining table. It was full of water. I never heard such a sound.

"He's out," I said. Which was pretty self-evident, with his eyeballs rolled up and his tongue hanging out dripping. "You check on Sam while I call the cops."

"That won't be necessary," said Millie.

"That won't be necessary," said a voice at the door.

Apparently everybody but me knew what was going on, or at least their own part of it. Lacking a quick repartee, I unstacked the alarm system and let a batch of two-tone green uniforms in the front door, then went to the kitchen to check on Millie and Sam.

"Did he get him?" I asked her.

"No, but he scared the pee out of the possum who's been eating

the catfood. Nearly took the cat door off its hinges when the bullets started whistling around his ears."

We held each other and laughed till tears ran down our cheeks, or maybe we cried till we started laughing.

**M**illie, dutifully domestic, had first fetched me a wrap (I'd forgotten I was naked as a jaybird) and then made a big batch of coffee. The lieutenant in charge stayed after Coke-head was carried out.

"No, we weren't waiting to get him on a homicide charge," he was saying. "We had at least one gun on him the whole time, and you weren't in all that much danger." I withheld comment, though my tongue hurt my teeth. "What we *were* hoping for was to find out something we didn't know."

"Like where's the money? I don't see any way the money got here. We figured they dropped dope from a DC-3, presumably coke, and had a boat along shore to pick it up, and stashed it somewhere in the mangroves. But I don't see how the actual dealing took place here."

"The way we piece it together, there had to be two vehicles. Our buddy there in the van, holding the goods for de-

livery after they'd been picked up, and another machine with the customers in it. The tracks were pretty well messed up before we checked that out, but there's one tread mark down there that ain't his and ain't ours.

"So instead of risking traveling with it, he must've arranged to meet them here. Knowing there's a vacant house facing the road, not knowing this one on the beach side was occupied. It seems deserted enough from the road.

"We know the money never was in this house—we searched it better than you noticed after he wrecked it—and it wasn't in the van or anywhere they could've got to in the mangroves. So either he was enough out of his head from eatin' up the profits he let it take a swim, or more likely his playmates circled back round and liberated the cash while he was trying to dig the van out. They might even have heaped some sand in front of his tires to help him dig in. Either way, it's gone. Prob'ly to Miami, maybe to Dry Tortugas."

We did eventually get a nice letter from the sheriff thanking us for being bait, though he didn't put it quite that way. I'd hoped for at least a certificate we could frame, maybe even a

modest reward or something, but we didn't qualify for an informant's fee and no reward was posted for the drugrunner personally. (He's now sitting in the county motel waiting to go on stage with a bunch of other Miami folks who've been working our once-peaceful coast.)

Not long after, I went down to the point to fetch some sweet Gulf oysters for lunch. We Older Men need all the help we can get. While I was there I tried to reconstruct the events of that night: what if . . . ?

The channel there isn't, by world standards, much of a channel. At low tide it's about four feet, but almost nothing around here draws more than three, so we get by. This one has enough flow that the bottom is sand and a little shell, no mud or silt to speak of, and there's an oyster bar at the offshore end so you make a hard turn or run aground.

If the money didn't leave with the customers, and the detectives assured us it wasn't buried or retrieved by the law, it had to end up in the water. If it was, in a case, it could sink where it hit or float out to sea, depending on weight, watertightness, and air space. If it was completely loose, consider it biodegradable. If it was free bundles, say out of a grocery bag or from an opened case, it

would sink and flow with the tide, and part of it could well be still retrievable. I could invest a little effort in a proposition like that.

I went back to the shed for the snorkel and mask. I didn't remember leaving them salty—I usually think to rinse them in fresh water—but people do borrow things. The tide was out-bound, so I started at the east end of what I considered the reasonable area and drifted slowly toward the bar, watching the bottom. I found an antique barnacled Prince Albert tin, odd bits of marine and fishery hardware, and an empty plastic coin purse. My breathing became shallower and quicker as I approached the most likely area, at the bend of the channel—beyond that it would get too deep and choppy for a snorkel search.

The end of the sandbar was barren, so I crossed over the channel and started working down the shell bar. It was slow work, foot by foot, amongst the scrabble of living and deceased oysters, but in half an hour I found three soggy bundles of banknotes, secondhand twenties and fifties. I felt a pang of

regret at God knows how much more washed out to sea, but I figured what I had would count out to several thousand. Not enough to retire on, but anything looks good to a freelancer.

Excited as a child, I started to hop, skip, and jump all the way to the cottage. Then I turned around and performed one of the most patient and disciplined acts of my life: I went back to the bar and picked enough oysters for lunch. Sam had been waiting with moderate patience on the shore, sporadically chasing sand-fiddlers, and we walked back to the house together, blithely swinging the bucket of oysters and money.

"Sorry I took so long," I said to Millie as I tracked wet sand across the screened porch. "You know, I've been thinking. A little trip would do us good—maybe a cruise to the Islands, or even some dumb tourist thing like Disney World."

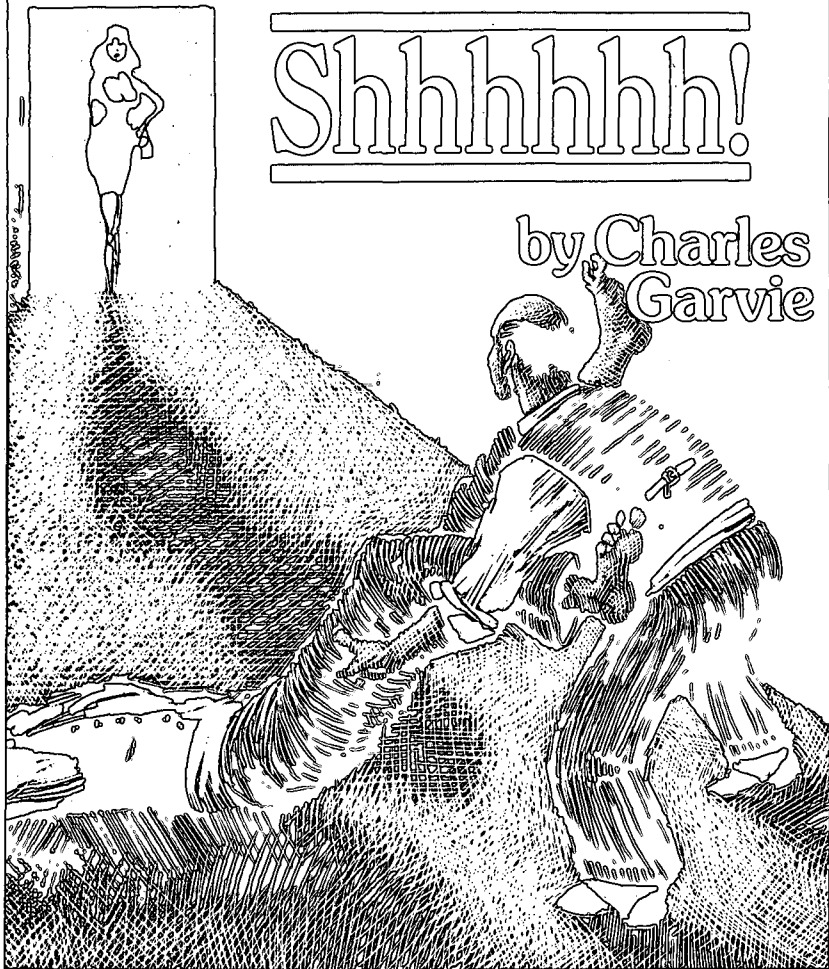
She came out of the kitchen bearing a decent-looking salad and gave me a sweet wet kiss.

"Put it under the loose floorboard in the hall closet with the rest of it. I'll dry it all out later," she answered.

FICTION

# Shhhhhhhh!

by Charles  
Garvie



The trouble with living in London flats nowadays is that you never can tell when you're going to be lumbered with a corpse at twenty past ten in the evening.

Like Mr. Crispin was. And strangely enough, it had all begun just five minutes earlier as one of those perfectly ordinary everyday neighborly exchanges, with Mr. Crispin.



tactfully suggesting to the young lout downstairs that it might be a really tiptop idea to put a sock in that damned row he was making and the aforementioned lout rejecting Mr. C.'s plan of action with a succinct two-word negative. A perfectly conventional flat-dwellers' conversation, and of course, whacking the yobbo one on the head with a handy cast iron doorstop was just the natural conclusion to their neighborly tete-a-tete, the consequences of which were now lying at Mr. Crispin's feet.

But progress *had* been made, and the noise—which had been the initial cause of the impromptu get-together—being quickly silenced by a smart blow to the CD system, it left only the tiresome red tape of getting rid of the evidence—i.e., the corpse—to be dealt with before Mr. Crispin could finish making his mother's cocoa.

The temptation was great, of course, to just leave well enough alone and let someone else attend to all the discovery and disposal bit, but it might be weeks before that happened and Mother had been quite intolerable enough last summer when the drains had blocked and the smell had driven her—and everyone who came in contact with her—to distraction.

So, mentally saying goodbye to his planned hour in the company of his new definitives, our hero sighed and decided it was time he gave his neighbor a lift.

There were only two flats on the lower floor—Mr. C. and his mother occupying the upper—and as Number One was lying in a heap at his feet and Number Two was in darkness, Mr. Crispin estimated that the coast was clear. Taking a deep breath, he picked up the body and hauled it out into the hallway, just as the street door swung open on noiseless hinges.

Mr. Crispin had himself oiled those very hinges not more than a week ago because the nocturnal comings and goings of Number One had disturbed Mother, and his efforts now paid off with interest and left him in the center of the hall dragging a corpse behind him without knowing that anyone was there. (The "anyone" in question being "Number Two" to Mr. Crispin and his mother, Lola to her friends, and "Princess Pulchritude" to the ticket sellers at the tube station.)

Now, at this point in any other story Lola would have been obliged to advertise her presence by screaming her pretty little head off, but as we're telling this like it is, we'll abandon our lip service to the genre and go for realism. Lola

raised her eyebrows, and finally seeing her, Mr. Crispin, who wasn't totally without style himself—in spite of living with his mother and collecting stamps—managed to aspire to a reasonable impersonation of his normal voice and murmur, “Oh, I'm so sorry. I do hope I'm not in your way.”

“Not at all,” purred Lola in a voice that could melt hearts at fifty feet—or paint at fifty yards if you're of an uncharitable disposition. “It's so nice to see someone carrying out a service for the community.”

“The community?” Mr. Crispin gulped, trying not to look down the valley of milk-white cleavage that was spread cinemascopically before his eyes.

“Why, yes,” she replied. “The quiet is so precious in the city, don't you think? So nice to see someone preserving it.” Then she added thoughtfully, “Tell me, do you have a script or are you just improvising?”

Mr. Crispin was totally at a loss for words but he managed to convey that he was, in fact, following the latter course, and Lola smiled encouragingly. “A post-modernist, how quaint,” she intoned huskily. “Have you thought of the river?”

“The river?”

“Yes, a very dark and dangerous footpath with poor lights. Not the sort of place for a lady

to frequent at night. So lonely, you know. A man might slip and fall and die there in the water. So sad, don't you think?”

Mr. Crispin didn't, actually, but as a tiny tear was trickling down Lola's cheek, he proffered his handkerchief and pretended that he did.

“Why don't you run along,” she whispered, playing seductively with a button on her dress, “while I fix up a little something . . .”

Outside, it had begun to pelt down rain, and the very sight of it made Arnott Halliday scowl. For Police Constable Halliday was not a happy man this fine evening; not only had he forfeited his night off at short notice *and* been paired up with old You-See-To-It-Arnott-Lad Anderson, but—worst of all—he had just succeeded in spearing his first sweet and sour prawn on the blunt prongs of a white plastic fork when the radio had crackled into life and asked him to check out an anonymous crank call about someone dumping a body in the river.

“I ask you,” Arnott had grumbled, throwing down his fork in disgust, “who in their right mind would be out dumping bodies in this blooming rain?”

But the dull metallic thud of

the raindrops pitterpattering on the car roof was his only reply, and if Anderson actually *did* say, "You see to it, Arnott lad," the other pretended he hadn't heard.

Lola was feeling just a little bit mean when the doorbell rang. She had been standing by the window watching the flashing lights on police cars by the river, and it seemed a really low trick to just stand by and let that sweet little rabbity-faced man from upstairs be caught in the act of disposing of his *hab-eas corpus* after he'd so obligingly got rid of that noisesome tyre from next door.

Still, she told her conscience, it wasn't as if he hadn't killed the man in the first place after all, and more important, there *was* the little matter of the radio. For if Mr. Crispin would insist on rising at six every morning to listen to "Farm Progress" on his mother's old wireless set at a volume fit to waken the dead, he didn't really give a person much choice. And, really, she asked herself, wasn't being free of that torture worth just a little bit of bad conscience now and again?

Yes, Lola thought, it certainly was, and setting her lovely face into a small, sad smile, she went to open the door.

And soon wished she hadn't.

Mr. Crispin had to wipe a tear from his eye as he surveyed the aftermath of the holocaust that had devastated his stamp collection. Old Halliday had known how to drive a hard bargain, and the fat toad was going to gloat insufferably at their stamp club meetings for the next six months to come.

Still, Mr. Crispin thought, the damage could be made good eventually, and it was far, far better than landing in the clink over slapping that little thug in Number One.

It *was* a shame, though, he admitted as his conscience administered a sharp jab to his posterior end, that they'd had to frame the pretty little girl downstairs, but since it had almost certainly been she who'd brought the gendarmes in in the first place, she could jolly well take what was coming to her.

Well, yes, all right, he admitted, he *could* have left her out of it altogether, but there *was* the little matter of those bluesy saxophone records she insisted on playing well into the small hours night after night. Surely it was worth a little bit of bad conscience now and again just to be free of that torture for life.

Yes, sighed Mr. Crispin as he

reached for his tweezers, it most certainly was, and bending over his denuded stamp collection, he began to enjoy the unfamiliar sensation of Peace, Perfect Peace.

So perfect a picture of domestic bliss did he make reveling in the sheer joy of his own contentment that it almost seems a sin to chronicle the entry of a promotion-hungry young C.I.D. sergeant who was at that moment going over Lola's flat with the proverbial fine-tooth comb and would soon unearth the bloodstained cast iron door-stop neatly wrapped in the monogrammed handkerchief that Mr. C. had proffered to Lola in that one mad moment of misplaced chivalry not so very long ago. . . .

Of course it was all purely circumstantial and didn't actually *prove* anything, but the jury, who were an easily led bunch of oiks from Beckenham Junction, had swallowed the state prosecutor's story without question and took exactly ten minutes to give their seal of approval to a fifteen-year all-expenses-paid sojourn at Her Majesty's Holiday Camp, Brixton.

And just to put the cherry on the parfait, they even decided that poor little Lola deserved a consolation prize of four years in Holloway for her stunning performance in the role of Ann Accessory.

And that, it seemed, was that. It was, if one may quote the local broadsheet, "just one of those all-too-common domestic tragedies of metropolitan life," and under normal circumstances, Mr. Crispin's "disgrace" would have broken his poor old mother's heart and forced her to leave the neighborhood. But as dear old Mrs. C. was too over the moon at getting rid of all her nasty, noisy neighbors at one fell swoop, she had no intention of going anywhere, and was even prepared to forgive her little boy anything on this occasion.

After all, she thought, she could always take him his stamp album when she went to visit him in the prison, and there'd be nothing to stop him listening to his awful farming program every morning in his cell, now would there?

Mrs. Crispin sighed happily. Wasn't it wonderful the way that one little phone call had solved *all* her problems so perfectly!



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# Pusan Nights

by  
Martin  
Limón

“The last time the U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk* pulled into the Port of Pusan, the Shore Patrol had to break up a total of thirty-three barroom brawls in the Texas Street area. Routine.

What we didn't expect was the fourteen sailors who were assaulted and robbed in the street. Six of them had to be hospitalized.

“From eyewitness accounts, the local provost marshal's of-



fice ascertained that the muggings appeared to have been perpetrated by Americans, probably the shipmates of the victims. However, no one was caught or charged with a crime."

We were in the big drafty headquarters building of the 8th Army's Criminal Investigation Division in Seoul, two hundred miles up the Korean Peninsula from Pusan. When the first sergeant had called me and my partner, Ernie Bascom, into his office, we expected the usual tirade for not having made enough blackmarket arrests. What we got was a new assignment. The first sergeant kept it simple.

"First, make sure you get on the right flight out of Kimpo. Then, when you get to Pusan, infiltrate the waterfront area and find out who's been pulling off these muggings."

Ernie adjusted his glasses and tugged on his tie.

"Maybe the gang who did it has left the navy and gone on to better things."

"Not hardly. The *Kitty Hawk* was here only six months ago. The tour in the navy is four years, minimum. Not enough time to break up the old gang."

Ernie got quiet. I knew him. He didn't want to seem too anxious to get this assignment, an all-expenses-paid trip to the wildest port in Northeast Asia, and he was cagey enough to put

up some objections. To put some concern in the first sergeant's mind about how difficult it would be to catch these guys. That way, if we felt like it, we could goof off the whole time and come up with zilch, and the groundwork for our excuse was already laid.

I had to admire him. Always thinking.

"And you, Sueño." The first sergeant turned his cold gray eyes on me. "I don't want you running off and getting involved in some grandiose schemes that don't concern you."

"You mean, stay away from the navy brass."

"I mean catch these guys who are doing the muggings. That's what you're being paid for. Some of those sailors were hurt badly the last time they were here, and I don't want it to happen again."

I nodded, keeping my face straight. Neither one of us was going to mouth off now and lose a chance to go to Pusan. To Texas Street.

The first sergeant handed me a brown envelope stuffed with copies of the blotter reports from the last time the *Kitty Hawk* had paid a visit to the Land of the Morning Calm. He stood up and, for once, shook both our hands.

"I hate to let you guys out of my sight. But nobody can infiltrate a village full of bars and

whores and drunken sailors better than you two." His face changed from sunshine to clouds. "If, however, you don't bring me back some results, I guarantee you'll have my highly polished size twelve combat boot placed firmly on your respective posteriors. You got that?"

Ernie grinned, a little weasel-toothed, half-moon grin. I concentrated on keeping my facial muscles steady. I'm not sure it worked.

We clattered down the long hallway and bounded down the steps to Ernie's jeep. When he started it up, he shouted, "Three days in Texas Street!"

I was happy. So was he.

But I had the uneasy twisting in my bowels that happens whenever I smell murder.

**B**y the time we landed in Pusan I had read over the blotter reports. They were inconclusive, based mainly on hearsay from Korean bystanders. The assailants were Americans, they said, dressed in bluejeans and nylon jackets, like their victims and like all the sailors on liberty who prowled the portside alleys of Texas Street. The Navy Shore Patrol had stopped some fights in barrooms and on the streets, but they were unable to apprehend even one of the muggers.

By interservice agreement, the army's military police in-

creased their patrols near the dock areas when a huge naval presence moved into the port of Pusan. The aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, with its accompanying flotilla and its over five thousand sailors, more than qualified as a huge naval presence.

The MP's were stationed, for the most part, on the inland army base of Hialeah Compound. They played on Texas Street, knew the alleys, the girls, the Mama-sans. But somehow they had been unable to make one arrest.

Sailors and soldiers don't often hit it off. Especially when the sailors are only in town for three days and manage to jack up all the prices by trying to spend two months' pay in a few hours. It seemed as if the MP's would be happy to arrest a few squids.

Something told me they weren't trying.

We caught a cab at the airport outside of Pusan and arrived at Hialeah Compound in the early afternoon. We got a room at the billeting office, and the first thing we did was nothing. Ernie took a nap. I kept thumbing through the blotter reports, worrying them to death.

There was a not very detailed road map of the city of Pusan in a tourist brochure in the rickety little desk provided to us by billeting. Hialeah Com-

pound was about three miles inland from the main port and had got its name because prior to the end of World War II the Japanese occupation forces had used its flat plains as a track for horse racing. The U.S. Army had turned it into a base to provide security and logistical support for all the goods pouring into the harbor. Pusan was a large city, and its downtown area sprawled between Hialeah Compound and the port. Pushed up along the docks, like a long, slender barnacle, was Texas Street. Merchant sailors from all over the world passed through this port, but it was only the U.S. Navy that came here in such force.

Using a thick-leaded pencil I plotted the locations of the muggings on the little map. The dots defined the district known as Texas Street. Not one was more than half a mile from where the *Kitty Hawk* was docked.

Ernie and I approached the big MP desk.

"Bascom and Sueño," Ernie said. "Reporting in from Seoul."

The desk sergeant looked down at us over the rim of his comic book.

"Oh, yeah. Heard you guys were coming. Hold on. The duty officer wants to talk to you."

After a few minutes, a little man with his chest stuck out

and a face like a yapping Chihuahua came out. He seemed lost in his highly starched fatigues. Little gold butter bars flapped from his collar.

"The commanding officer told me to give you guys a message."

We waited.

The lieutenant tried to expand his chest. The starched green material barely moved.

"Don't mess with our people. We got a good MP company down here; any muggings that happen, we'll take care of them; and we don't need you two sending phony reports up to Seoul, trying to make us look bad."

His chest deflated slightly. He seemed exhausted and out of breath.

"Is that it?"

"Yeah."

Ernie walked around him and looked back up at the desk sergeant.

"How many patrols are you going to have out at Texas Street tonight?"

"Four. Three MP's per jeep."

"Three?"

The desk sergeant shrugged. "We'd have four per jeep if we could. The advance party of the *Kitty Hawk's* arriving tonight."

"All patrols roving?"

"No. One in the center of the strip, two more on either end, and one patrol roving."

"You must put your studs in the center."

"You got that right."

"Who performs your liaison with the Shore Patrol?"

The desk sergeant shrugged again. "The lieutenant here, such as it is. Mainly they run their own show, out of the port officer's headquarters, down by the docks."

"Thanks. If we find out anything—and there's time—we'll let your MP's make the arrest."

"Don't do us any favors. Those squids can kill each other for all I care."

The lieutenant shot him a look. The desk sergeant glanced at the lieutenant and then back down at the comic book on his desk.

We turned to walk out. Ernie winked at the lieutenant, who glared after us until we faded into the thickening fog of the Pusan night.

Texas Street was long and bursting with music and brightly flashing neon.

The colors and the songs changed as we walked down the street, and the scantily clad girls waved at us through beaded curtains, trying to draw us in. Young American sailors in bluejeans and nylon jackets with embroidered dragons on the back bounced from bar to bar enjoying the embraces of the "business girls," who still outnumbered them. The main force of their shipmates had not arrived yet, and the *Kitty Hawk*

would not dock until dawn. But Texas Street was ready for them.

We saw the MP's. The jeep in the center of Texas Street was parked unobtrusively next to a brick wall, its radio crackling. The three MP's smoked and talked, big brutes all. We stayed away from them and concentrated on blending into the crowd.

Ernie was having no trouble at all. In bar after bar we toyed with the girls, bought drinks only for ourselves, and kept from answering their questions about which ship we were on by constantly changing the subject.

One of the girls caught on that we were in the army by our unwillingness to spend too much money and by the few Korean words that we let slip out.

"Don't let the Mama-san hear you speaking Korean," she said. "If she does, she will know that you're in the army, and she will not let me talk to you."

"What's wrong with GI's?"

I could answer that question with volumes, but I wanted to hear her version.

"All GI's Cheap Charlie. Sailors are here for only a short time. They spend a lot of money."

We filed the economics lesson, finished our beers, and staggered to the next bar.

Periodically we hung around near one of the MP patrols, within earshot of their radio,

waiting for a report of a fight or a mugging. So far it was a quiet night.

Later, a group of white uniformed sailors on Shore Patrol duty ran past us, holding onto their revolvers and their hats, their nightsticks flapping at their sides. We followed and watched while they broke up a fight in one of the bars. A gray navy van pulled up, and the disheveled revelers were loaded aboard.

We found a noodle stand and ate, giving ourselves away as GI's to the wizened old proprietor by knowing what to order. Ernie sipped on the hot broth and then took a sip of a cold bottle of Oriental beer.

"Quiet night."

"No revelations yet."

"Maybe tomorrow, when the entire flotilla arrives."

"Flotilla. Sounds like the damn Spanish Armada."

"Yeah. Except a lot more powerful."

Just before the midnight curfew the Shore Patrol got busy again chasing the sailors back to the ship or off the streets.

We had taken a cab all the way back to Hialeah Compound before we heard about the mugging.

"One sailor," the desk sergeant said. "Beat up pretty bad. The navy medical personnel are taking care of him now."

"Any witnesses?"

"None. Happened right before curfew. Apparently he was trying to make it back to the ship."

In the morning, before our eggs and coffee, we found out that the sailor was dead.

The buildings that housed the port officer's headquarters were metal Quonset huts differentiated from the Army Corps of Engineers' Quonset huts only by the fact that they were painted battleship gray while the army's buildings were painted olive drab. Slightly less colorful than Texas Street.

The brass buttons on the old chief's coat bulged under the expanding pressure of his belly. We showed our identification.

"Who was the sailor who got killed in the mugging last night?"

The chief shuffled through some paperwork. "Petty Officer Third Class Lockworth, Gerald R."

"What ship was he on?"

"The U.S.S. *Swann*. One of the tenders for the *Kitty Hawk*. They say he was carrying a couple months' pay."

"Nothing left on him?"

"No."

"Maybe the girls got to it first."

"Maybe. But I doubt it. He was a three year veteran of the Pacific Fleet."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Massive hemorrhage of the brain."

"Have you got your eyes on any particular group of sailors that might be preying on their shipmates?"

"Not really. The brass tends to think that it's some Korean gangs working the streets. Maybe they've developed a taste for the 7th Fleet payroll. That would explain why there haven't been any arrests made."

"The police here want to protect the sailors. There's a lot of pressure from the ROK Government to make the U.S. Navy feel welcome."

"Maybe. But at a lower level, policies have a habit of being changed."

"Do you buy all that, chief?"

"Could be. I keep an open mind. But in general I tend to go with the scuttlebutt."

"What's that?"

"That it's some of your local GI's that got a taste for the 7th Fleet payroll."

"If the average sailor starts to believe either one of those viewpoints, it could cause a lot of trouble down here on Texas Street."

"Yeah. I wouldn't want to be a dogface on liberty in this town tonight."

"Thanks for the encouragement."

"You're welcome."

The *Kitty Hawk* finally pulled in at noon, and standing by the dock were the mayor and the provincial governor and the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet band. The sailors lined the deck of the huge floating edifice, their bellbotoms and kerchiefs flapping in the breeze. The ship's captain and his staff, in their dazzling white uniforms, bounced down the gangplank to the tune of "Anchors Aweigh" and were greeted by a row of beautiful young Korean maidens in traditional dresses who placed leis over their necks and bowed to them in greeting.

The governor made a speech of welcome and the captain answered with a long rambling dissertation on the awesome firepower of the *Kitty Hawk*. Greater, he said, than the entire defense establishments of some countries.

"I thought he wasn't supposed to confirm or deny that they have nuclear capability," I said.

Ernie smirked. "He's also not supposed to confirm or deny that he's a jerk."

After the tedious ceremony was over, the sailors—free at last—poured like a great white sea into the crevices and alleys of Texas Street.

The night was mad. The Shore Patrol ran back and forth, un-

able to keep up with all the ex-



plosions being ignited by the half-crazed sailors. Even the MP's had to keep on the move. They were tense. Alert.

I saw different faces in the jeeps tonight and asked one of the MP's about it.

"We're on twenty-four hour alert while the *Kitty Hawk* is here, but we have to get some rest sometime."

"Twelve hour shifts?"

"Or more, if needed."

Ernie and I wandered away from the bright lights, checking the outskirts of the bar district. Like all beasts of prey, the muggers would look for stragglers, strays who'd wandered from the main herd.

It was mostly residential areas back there, high walls of brick or stone and securely boarded gates.

There were a few bars, however, and a few neighborhood eateries. Some sailors were wandering around, those who wanted to get away from the hubbub.

A couple of big Americans about a block in front of us turned a corner. They looked familiar to me somehow. We trotted after them, but by the time we got to the dimly lit intersection they were gone.

"Who was it?"

"I'm not sure."

We walked into a bar closer to Texas Street proper and ignored the girls until they left

us alone with only two cold beers for company.

"We're not getting anywhere," Ernie said.

"Something's got to break soon."

"It better. It's not just muggings any more. It's murder."

I felt my innards sliding slowly into knots.

"We got to stay out tonight. Through curfew if we have to."

"Yeah."

I looked at Ernie. "Could it be the Koreans?"

"It could. But if the Korean National Police really believed it, they'd be cracking down on every local hoodlum hard, trying to squeeze the truth out of them."

"What if the local police are in on it?"

"Then we're in trouble. But I don't believe it. Too much pressure from up top. The Koreans need us to ensure that their Communist brothers to the north don't pour down here like they did more than two decades ago. And maybe more important nowadays is that they need the foreign exchange the fleet brings in."

"And if the navy seriously believes that the Koreans aren't doing everything they can to stop the assaults on their sailors, they could stop coming into port here."

"They'd lose dock fees and re-supply money..."

"Not to mention tourism."

We both laughed.

"Somebody in the navy then. In the advance party?"

"Could be that, since the *Kitty Hawk* was still at sea last night."

I thought about the map I had made and the blotter reports.

"The last time the *Kitty Hawk* was here, there were no muggings until they had docked."

"So?"

"We've been assuming that it's probably a gang of sailors aboard the *Kitty Hawk* that have been preying on their own shipmates."

"Yeah, but maybe there's more than one group. Ideas like this are catching."

"That's possible. But maybe it is somebody in the advance party or maybe it's somebody who's here all the time. Somebody who knows the terrain, the lie of the land, the ins and outs of all the back alleys."

"And if it's not Koreans..."

"That's right. GI's. GI's who spend a lot of time down here."

"Village rats."

"All the GI village rats have gone into hiding until the fleet leaves."

"So it seems."

I took a sip of my beer. I didn't like what I was going to say.

"That leaves the MP's."

Ernie thought about it for a minute. "That would also explain why there were no arrests made in the past."

"It sure would."

He looked at me. "But why do the muggings only occur when the *Kitty Hawk* is here? And not other navy ships?"

"That I don't know yet." I looked around. "Let's find a phone."

"A phone?"

"Yeah. I got a call I want to make."

The desk sergeant didn't want to answer any of my questions at first because he could see what I was getting at, but I reminded him that this was an official investigation and he would be obstructing that investigation if he didn't cooperate in every reasonable way.

I borrowed paper and a pencil from the Mama-san and wrote furiously, trying at the same time to keep one finger in my ear to drown out the insane rock music. I seriously considered asking Ernie to hold his finger in my ear, but he was busy flirting with a couple of the girls.

Besides, there are limits to a partnership, even for crime-busters.

I had what I needed. Ernie looked at the sheet. A bunch of names, ranks, and times scribbled across the wrinkled paper.

"What's that?"

"No time to explain. Let's go."

The girls pouted on our way

The MP jeep that held the central position on Texas Street was cruising slowly down the crowded block. I waved them down, and they came to a halt. I looked at my notes and read off three names to them.

"Have you seen any of those guys? Tonight? In civilian clothes?"

I'm not too good a judge of whether someone is telling the truth or lying, but this time I had an edge. The young buck sergeant on the passenger side let the muscles beneath his cheek flutter a couple of times. Then he blinked his eyes and said, "No."

I thanked him for the information. He'd given me more than he knew.

We walked off into the darkness away from the men, heading from the center of Texas Street towards the place a few blocks away where I had seen the two big Americans turn down a dark alley and disappear. We wandered around for a while, and in order to cover more ground we split up, agreeing on our routes and where to meet in fifteen minutes.

A couple of blocks later I saw the big guy I had seen before, standing at the mouth of an alley. He looked into the alley at something and then back at me, as if undecided what to do.

I shouted, "Hey!" And I started running towards him.

He hesitated for a second and then ran. I let him go and turned down the alley he had been protecting. It was dark. I could see nothing. Then I tripped, sprawled, and something hit me from behind.

When I came to, Ernie was looking down at me, surrounded by some sailors in their dress whites and Shore Patrol armbands. I was never so happy to see squids.

They got me into their van and took me somewhere. Ernie told me, but it didn't register. Nothing much did. On the way there, I passed out again.

The next morning when I woke up I waited for a while and then asked the medic when he walked into the room.

"Where am I?"

"The dispensary. On Hialeah Compound. Had a pretty nasty bump on the noggin last night."

"What's my condition?"

"Hold on."

The medic left the room, and after a few minutes a doctor came in. He looked at my head, checked some X-rays up against a lightboard, and then pronounced me fit for duty.

No shirkers in this man's army. I could've used a few days off.

While I was getting dressed, Ernie showed up. He consoled me by reminding me about the

Happy Hour at the Hialeah NCO Club tonight.

"Exotic dancers, too," he said.

I smiled, but it hurt the back of my head.

**T**he bright sun of southern Korea was out. In force.

"Personnel? Why personnel?"

"I want to check something out. On Leonard Budusky."

"Who?"

"An MP who I think is an acquaintance of mine."

After we showed him our identification, the personnel clerk got Budusky's folder. "He came to Korea over six months ago," I said.

The bespectacled clerk ran his finger down a column of typed entries.

"Seven," he said.

"What state is he from?"

"Virginia."

I held up my hand. "Wait a minute. Let me guess. Norfolk."

The clerk looked up at me, his eyes almost as wide as his mouth.

"How the hell did you know that?"

Ernie tried to pretend that he was in on the whole thing, but when we got to the Main Post Snack Bar, he bought me some coffee and threatened me with disembowelment if I didn't tell him what was going on.

Considering the pain I was

in, I probably wouldn't have noticed it much if I'd let him go through with it. Instead, to humor him, I explained.

"First of all, to find the culprit, we've got to figure out motive and opportunity."

"I remember that much from C.I.D. school."

"The motive seemed to be money. Now, that narrows our list of suspects down to anybody in the 7th Fleet, any GI stationed near Pusan, or any of the Korean citizens of this wonderful city.

"The next step is figuring out opportunity. That brings us closer because that narrows it down to the four thousand or so sailors who had liberty during the stopover, the three hundred or so GI's who had passes, and, again, all the Korean citizens of this fair city."

"So it's a tough job. We knew that."

"But the mugger got anxious. On the first night, when only the advance party was in, he attacked. That eliminated all the sailors who were at sea with the *Kitty Hawk*. When Petty Officer Lockworth died, it also eliminated, in my mind, the Korean civilian populace. Because there is no doubt that the Korean authorities would take the mugging of American sailors seriously; but they realize the enormity of the bad public relations they would get back

in the States if a Korean was found to have done a killing. The fact that they still didn't launch an all-out manhunt meant to me that they must be confident, through their own sources, that it wasn't the work of one of their local hoodlums.

"That leaves the GI's. When the fleet is in, soldiers tend to be conspicuous. They stick out, by virtue of their stinginess, from their seafaring compatriots, and the girls down in the village can spot them a mile away.

"We wandered all over Texas Street for two nights and didn't see any, did we?"

"Not except for the MP's."

"Exactly, and except for the two big guys we saw in that alley that looked familiar to me. After I called the desk sergeant and got the names of all the MP's who had duty on the first night, it started to click. The three big studs in the central patrol had all stayed on duty past curfew. Of the four patrols, theirs was the only patrol that did. Of the three of them, the desk sergeant told me that the biggest and meanest was Corporal Leonard Budusky. I remembered their faces. Two of them were the guys we saw scurrying down that alley. When the MP's on duty denied having seen them, I knew it had to be a lie. When MP's are in the village having fun, they

will seek out the on-duty patrol, to let them know where they're at or just to say hello.

"When that young buck sergeant on duty realized that the notorious out-of-town C.I.D. agents were asking about his partners, his first reaction was to lie and protect them."

"So you know two MP's were on duty the first night, when the guy got killed, and you know they were out the second night, off duty, when you got beamed. You still don't have any proof."

"You're right about that. And they'll know it, too. Probably just go about their work as if nothing happened and if we ask them any questions deny everything. But the one thing I do have, that the killer doesn't know about, is the motive."

"Money?"

"Partially. But mainly his motive is something that abounds in a city with a big naval base like Norfolk."

"What's that?"

"Hatred." I took a sip of the hot bitter coffee. "Hatred of the U.S. Navy."

**I**t was a lot easier stalking Texas Street now that we knew who we were looking for. The desk sergeant had already told me, but I checked all four MP jeeps just to be sure. Leonard Budusky and his burly partner were not on duty to-

night. They had pulled the day shift and got off about two hours ago.

Ernie had been disappointed when we missed Happy Hour at the NCO Club, and the exotic dancer, but I told him it would be in both our best interests if we remained sober.

The Pusan streets were filling again with fog. It was damp, cold, and dark.

This time we had weapons. A roll of dimes for me. Ernie had a short, brutal club, a wooden mallet, tucked into the lining of his jacket.

We patrolled methodically, keeping to the shadows. The Texas Street area is big, but not that big. Eventually we found them.

They were coming out of a bar, laughing and waving to the smiling girls.

"Spending money like sailors on shore leave," Ernie said.

"Must have come into an inheritance."

Budusky was tall, about six foot four, with squared shoulders and curly blond hair. His partner was the young guy who had enticed me into the mouth of the alley last night. He was tall, almost as tall as Budusky, and just as robust.

I'm pretty big myself, and have had a little experience on the streets of East L.A., but Ernie was a lightweight in this crowd. Less than six feet and

only about a hundred and seventy pounds.

We followed them carefully, one of us on either side of the street, hiding as we went. They weren't paying much attention, though. Still laughing and talking about the girls.

Finally, when the alleys ran out of street lamps, they stopped. They took up positions, one behind an awning, the other behind a telephone pole, as if they'd been there before. I wished I had brought my little map, to check the positions of the previous muggings. It didn't matter much now, though. The opening to a dark, seemingly pitch-black alley loomed behind them. They had chosen their position well.

Ernie and I remained hidden. We could see each other from across the street, but the two MP's couldn't see us.

It took twenty minutes for three sailors, lost in their drunkenness, to wander down the road. They were little fellows, in uniform, hats tilted at odd angles. Two of them had beer bottles in their hands, and each had his wallet sticking out from beneath his tunic, folded over his waistband.

The navy's into tradition. Even if it's stupid. Or maybe especially if it's stupid. No pockets.

We let the sailors pass us. I



them. Of course, he wasn't the type to warn them anyway.

They didn't see us as they passed. They were laughing and joking, and I doubt they would have noticed a jet plane if it had swooped down five feet over their heads.

What did swoop down was Budusky and his partner. Two of the sailors went down before the third even realized what was happening. He swung his beer bottle, but it missed its mark and he was enveloped by the two marauding behemoths.

Ernie and I slid out of our hiding places and floated up the hill, my roll of dimes clenched securely in my right fist. Ernie smashed his mallet into the back of the MP's head, and I knew all our problems were over with him. But just as I launched my first punch at Budusky, he swiveled and caught the blow on his shoulder. I punched again, but I was off balance from having missed the first blow, and he countered and caught me in the ribs. It was hard, but I've had worse, and then we were toe to toe, belting each other, slugging viciously. It could have gone either way, and I was happy to see Ernie looming up behind him. I jabbed with my left and backed off, waiting for it all to end, but then, as if a trapdoor had opened beneath his feet, Ernie disappeared. I realized that one of

the sailors had gotten up and, thinking Ernie was one of the enemy, had grabbed him and pulled him down. Another of the sailors came to, and now the three of them were rolling around on the ground flailing clubs and beer bottles at each other, cursing, spitting, and scratching.

Something blurred my vision, and Budusky was on me. I twisted, slipped a punch, and caught him with a good left hook in the midsection. He took it, punched back, and then we were wrestling. I lost my footing, pulled him down with me, and we rolled down the incline. I threw my weight and kept us rolling, I wasn't sure why. Just to get us into the light, I guess. Our momentum increased our speed, and finally we jarred to a stop.

Blind chance had determined that it would be Budusky's back that hit the cement pole with the full force of our rolling bodies. I punched him a couple of times on the side of his head before I realized that he was finished. I got up in a crouch and checked his pulse. It was steady. I slapped his face a couple of times. His eyes opened. Before he could pull himself together, I rolled him over on his stomach, pulled my handcuffs out from the back of my belt, and locked his hands securely behind the small of his back.

I heard whistles and then running feet. The Shore Patrol surrounded me and then a couple of MP's. The MP's stood back, as if they wanted nothing to do with this.

I lifted Budusky by the collar and pushed his face back to the pavement.

"Why? Why'd you kill Lockworth?"

His face was contorted, grimacing in pain. His eyes were clenched. I lifted him and slammed him back again.

"It was your dad, wasn't it? Your dad was a sailor. And he left you, you and your mother."

It was an old story and didn't take a great leap of imagination. An illegitimate kid from Norfolk, growing up to hate the navy, joining the army as an MP, finding his opportunity to take his revenge. A few bumps, a few bruises, a few dollars, and a sailor would get over it. It was the least they owed him for what his dad had done to him and his mother. Until he went too far. And killed.

I heard Budusky talking. It

was choking out of his throat.

"He left us, like you said. That's why they owed me."

"And when you last heard from him . . ."

"Yeah." The tears seemed to be squeezed out of his eyes. "When the last letter came, he was on the *Kitty Hawk*."

Ernie and I left the next day with the date for Budusky's court-martial set for next month.

Back in Seoul the first sergeant requested that the venue be changed about a hundred miles north, to Camp Henry in Taegu. Ernie and I had to appear in court as witnesses, and it wouldn't be smart to give the MP's in Pusan a chance to get at us.

I could understand their feelings. They saw us as traitors to the Military Police Corps. Maybe we were.

But none of those MP's ever sat down to write a letter to the parents of the late Petty Officer Third Class Gerald R. Lockworth.

I did.

FICTION

# A Dry Manhattan Story

by Alan Gordon

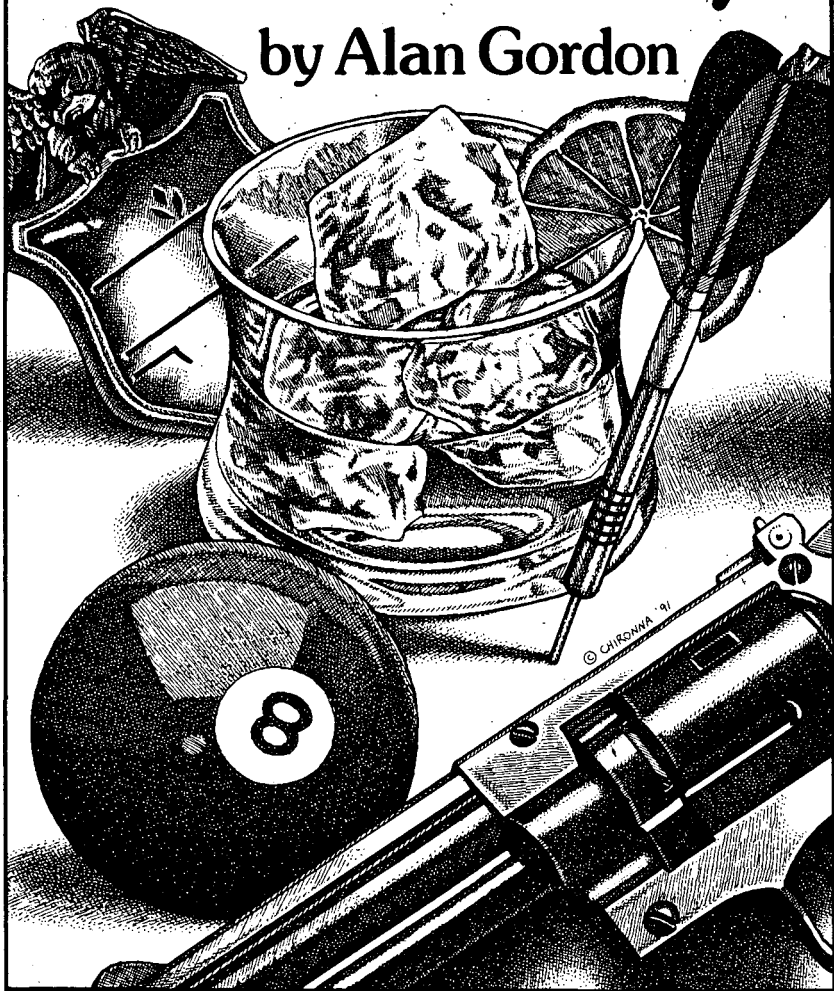


Illustration by Ron Chironna

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“Tell me a story, Vince.”

It was ten o'clock, shutdown time at the airport, and Litelli and Lopez were making a final tour of the security checkpoints in the main terminal before turning it over to the night shift. A few late flights were still straggling in, and Customs had phased down to just a few personnel. The shops and restaurants had closed, and the bums and panhandlers were settling down for the night. As head of security, Litelli had come to an informal accommodation with those who made the airport their home: He wouldn't give them trouble as long as they behaved and allowed his people to search them periodically for drugs and weapons. Lopez had just finished frisking Downtown Louie. He was clean, and she flipped him a quarter so he could watch the news on a pay-TV before falling asleep in an upright position on one of those hard plastic chairs.

The storytelling was a private ritual for Litelli and Lopez. They would be checking the burglar gates on the shops, and whenever they passed the candy store, Lopez would glance quickly at a heart-shaped box of chocolates. Her normally steel-hard eyes would soften at some private memory that Li-

telli swore he would never ask her about, and then some thirteen to fifteen steps later, she would ask him for some war-story from his days on the force.

“Okay,” he said, racking his brain. “This one you haven't heard. This is from when I was a detective second grade, working out of the Three-Oh. You know the Three-Oh?”

“Not too well. I was downtown, mostly.”

“Well, this was about fifteen years ago, and I had only been a detective for maybe eight months. There were four of us on the two-to-ten: me, Barry Dunwell, Jamie O'Donohugh, and Jerry Elfman.”

“Jerry the Elf? I never knew you worked with him.”

“You heard of him?”

She barked a quick, derisive laugh. “There is more stuff written about Jerry the Elf in department ladies' rooms than anyone else. He must have hit on half the female cadets when he was instructing at the academy.”

“Yeah, well, so you can imagine what he was like when he was actually young enough to do anything with them. Anyway, we used to go after work to a local bar called Lenny's to wind down, compare notes...”

“Drink, chase women...”

“That too, although I was a nice married man back then.

The place was a neighborhood bar, no margaritas in designer colors, just your basic domestic beer and hard liquor joint. Everybody knew everybody, and Tom, the bartender, knew everybody and their drink. He'd start pouring the moment he saw you come in so you didn't have to waste time ordering. Expert bartender, the best ever. There was a pool table, dart board, pinball machine, and a jukebox with Irish music and Sinatra on it, nothing else. We'd drink, schmooze, solve the problems of mankind, and call it a night. Sometimes one of the guys would get lucky, sometimes not. Then Lois Moorehouse showed up."

Litelli closed his eyes, visualizing the smoke, the noise, the fumes fighting the aromas, and remembered the night she came in. They were arguing over whether the Mets would repeat or not when Jerry the Elf's entire body stiffened in the direction of the bar like a pointer picking up a scent. A new woman, guessed Litelli as he turned to look. She was about twenty-five, with the blowsy elegance of a beautiful woman who had been in bars long before she was old enough to drink legally. She slid onto the bar stool with the practiced ease of someone who knew how to show off her legs to an ap-

preciative room. And the room was certainly getting appreciative fast as a multitude of male murmurs eddied about, colliding and spinning off each other until there was a dull roar of "Check this one out."

But no one was faster in these situations than Jerry the Elf. Quicker than thought, he was sitting next to her, id firmly in control.

"May I buy you a drink?" he said, using the most obvious approach.

"Thank you," she said with a smile that would have melted an iceberg. "A Manhattan, dry, with rye. And with a twist of lime."

"Lime?" said Tom. "Most take 'em with lemon."

"I am not most people," she said, turning the smile on the barkeep, only this one would have brought the iceberg back. Tom shrugged and fixed the drink, and she turned her attentions back to the Elf. He talked, she laughed in all the right places; and some heavy betting started going down.

"Think she's a pro?" muttered Dunwell.

"Nah, she'd be too obvious," commented Litelli.

"Five bucks says the Elf goes home with her," said O'Donoghue.

"That's a sucker bet," said Dunwell. "She may not be a pro,

but she came in here looking for action."

"Yeah," agreed Litelli. "Watch the two of 'em, it's hard to tell which one's the bait and which one's the fish. Well, gentlemen, it's been a lousy day, so naturally I'm going home to my wife. See you tomorrow."

*"So, did the Elf score?" asked Lopez.*

*"The Elf not only scored, he fell for her. Every night he'd wait for her, then order her drink. 'A Manhattan for the lady, Tom, dry, with rye, and with a twist of lime, not lemon.' Tom would keep on arguing about the lime, she'd keep on drinking, and the rest of us just sat and envied him being with this woman."*

*"The Elf in love. Hard to believe."*

*"Of course it didn't last."*

Two weeks later, the Elf spent the entire day moping at his desk. When they got to the bar, to their surprise he sat with them at their regular table.

"No Lois tonight?" asked Dunwell.

"Nope," spat the Elf. The other three glanced around the table, wondering who should ask the next question. Litelli took a deep breath and prepared to duck. "What happened, Jerry?"

The Elf slammed his glass down. "She dropped me. No explanation, just it's been great, it's been fun, you've been lovely, now you're done. I say, what about being in love? and she laughs. What the hell happened? I don't know, just that I'm out."

Tom appeared out of nowhere with a refill. "On the house," he said. Tom was like that.

Just then, Lois Moorehouse entered the bar. Without even glancing in Jerry's direction, she sauntered by the pool table, sized up the players, and sunk her hooks into the tallest one, a guy named Cater. Mesmerized, he followed her to the bar, and said, "A dry Manhattan, Tom. With rye."

"And with a twist, Tom," she added.

"I know, Miss Moorehouse," growled Tom. "Lime, not lemon."

And Cater started talking to her, and she let him think the whole thing was her idea, and the four detectives just stared.

"Gotta go," Dunwell said finally.

"Me too," said O'Donohugh.

"C'mon, Jerry," said Litelli, and laying a firm grip on the Elf's arm, he half-led, half-dragged him out of there.

The Elf kept staring at the bar. Dunwell flagged a cab, and the three of them forced the Elf inside.



"I'll see that he gets home," said Dunwell, climbing in after him.

*"Then two weeks later?" guessed Lopez.*

*"You catch on fast."*

Two weeks later, the four detectives entered the bar and saw a cluster of pool players hovering around Cater, who was crying into the latest of a series of beers. As they sat down, Tom made the rare gesture of bringing their drinks to their table himself rather than giving them to the waitress.

"What happened to Cater?" asked Dunwell.

"Same thing that happened to Jerry. She dumped him, no explanation. He's broken up over it. Can't even sink a sitting duck at the table. Keeps scratching, and you know Cater doesn't do that."

"The bitch," muttered Jerry. "I haven't been able to think straight since she did it to me."

"A lot of people are very angry about it," said Tom. "I just wish she would go somewhere else tonight."

On cue, the door opened, and a hush fell over the room as Lois Moorehouse came in. She ambled past the pool table and watched a dart game in progress.

Then she leaned over to

one of the players and said, "Buy me a drink."

Cater stood up with a roar. "Nobody buys you a drink unless it's me. Give her the damn Manhattan, Tom, and don't forget the goddam twist of lime."

"Yeah, Tom," shouted Jerry, striding towards the dart players. "No lemon, just lime for the lady. Only I'm buying."

The chosen dart player turned around, clutching two darts in his hand. "Stay out of this, runt. The lady is with me."

"This is not a good situation," said Litelli, getting to his feet.

"Yeah," said Dunwell. "Three drunk, angry people, armed with darts, pool cues, and an off-duty gun."

"Plus all of their drunk, angry friends," added O'Donohugh.

Cater, the Elf, and the dart player glowered at each other in a decent rendition of the final confrontation in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, then charged, bellowing, up to the bar. Three heads cracked together, followed by the smash of a pool cue, the slash of a dart, and the flash of a badge. The badge was Litelli's, but nobody seemed to pay much attention to it. The various supporting factions piled onto the original combatants like they were looking for a loose football. The three detectives hauled the Elf out of the fight. Litelli looked up briefly

to see Lois Moorehouse watching calmly, an amused smile on her face. Litelli turned his attention back to the Elf, who was frantically trying to reach his .38 while Dunwell and O'Donohugh pinioned his arms. Dunwell yelled, "Do it!" and Litelli swung his fist into the Elf's jaw. He only needed to hit him once. The Elf sagged into his brother officers' arms.

"Shouldn't someone call the police?" screamed one of the pool players.

"Excuse me, we're here," shouted Litelli, and three badges waved in the air. Surprisingly, this had the desired effect. The fighting ceased, excepting one bottle smashing down on a dart player's head. Various people were bleeding from various places, but everyone seemed able to walk.

"Okay, I suggest that we all call it a night," said Litelli. "Anyone hurt bad? Nothing a Band-aid won't help? Good, go home. Nothing happened here."

The dart players left first, followed by Cater and company. The three detectives helped Tom right the tables and chairs, then picked up the Elf and headed home.

"So, what happened next?" asked Lopez.

"Patience. The good part is coming up."

Litelli and Dunwell were driving from an apartment burglary the next day when they caught the squeal. Corpse in car by the park. A uniform was maintaining crowd control as they arrived. The car was parked illegally in an access road used by the park's maintenance people. In the driver's seat was Lois Moorehouse, wearing the same outfit that she'd had on in the bar the previous evening. She was facing forward. Actually, only her body was facing forward. Her actual face was facing backward. Her final expression was one of peevishness.

"Whattaya think?" said Dunwell.

"Either her neck's broken or she doubled for Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*," said Litelli. "I'd say she's probably dead."

"You don't think the Elf, do ya?"

Litelli had been thinking just that. "We'll have to question him. If we don't, someone will start wondering why."

"Plus, it might have been him," said Dunwell.

"That too."

The Elf had called in sick that day. It hadn't surprised Litelli. His knuckles still ached from slugging him. When they knocked on his door, they heard some staggering footsteps, then some retching. When he finally

opened it, he looked slightly worse than they expected.

"Hello," he said. "What's up?"

"Where'd you go after we brought you home last night?" said Litelli.

The Elf paled. "What happened? Who got what that you should be asking me about it?"

Litelli sighed. The Elf, even in his current condition, would not be an easy interrogation. "Lois was killed last night. Or sometime this morning. Did you go out after we brought you home?"

The Elf sat down on the front stoop, rubbing his eyes. "Yeah, I did. I headed back to the bar. I wanted to talk to her. I was mad. But I never made it there."

"Why not?" said Dunwell.

"I ran into Cater. He was gonna do the same thing. We started screaming about it at each other, then we started slugging each other, then I think we realized what a stupid situation it was. I started laughing, even while he was hitting me, and then he started laughing, and we sat there in the middle of the street and just howled."

"Then what?"

"We went to another bar and got blasted. We were together the whole time."

"But you split up, didn't you?" said Litelli.

"Nope," grinned the Elf. "He's

in there, sleeping on the couch."

Litelli and Dunwell stared at each other, then went in to arouse the sleeping giant. Cater, once he had sufficiently cleared his head, confirmed the Elf's account.

"What time did you get back here?" asked Litelli.

"Dunno," said Cater. "I was wasted. I came in here and passed out."

"How much did you have to drink?"

Cater thought for a minute. "A lot," he concluded finally.

"How about you?" Litelli asked, turning to the Elf.

"Less than him. We came back here because he couldn't remember where he lived. I think about one."

"Okay, don't leave town," said Litelli.

Dunwell waited until they got outside to speak.

"Could've been either one. It's not really an alibi. One guy passes out, the other one heads back. Jerry could've gotten Cater extra drunk, or slipped him a mickey, used him for the alibi, and snuck out after he falls asleep."

"Cater could've done it to Jerry, too," said Litelli as they got into the car. "Or they both could've done it together. Motive, opportunity."

"Terrific. All we need is evidence, and you know Jerry's too

smart to leave any. He'd put on gloves so there wouldn't be fingerprints, and he'd strangle her so there'd be no bullet to trace."

"Yeah, only he's just a little guy. Cater's big enough to break her neck like that. He could do it easy. I think he's our guy. He's too big to drink so much he'd pass out."

"Or it could have been someone else entirely."

"Yeah," said Litelli. "Great thing about New York is that there's never a suspect shortage."

They spent the rest of the day checking on the other pool and dart players. All of them could account for their whereabouts. Then they went to Lenny's. Tom nodded as they came in. "Drinks? You're a little early tonight."

"No, thanks," replied Litelli. "You heard about Lois?"

"Sure," said Tom. "You want to know about what happened when you left?"

They nodded. "Well," said Tom. "Once the walking wounded headed out, there weren't too many people left. I gave her her drink, and Bess and I kept picking up the mess. She was talking to some guy, not a regular, he was drinking Budweisers. She may have left with him. About one A.M. He was about thirty, maybe five eleven, brown hair, flannel shirt,

jeans, and that's all I can remember."

Litelli wrote it down, and they headed back to the precinct.

"So Lois walked out with her killer," commented Dunwell.

"Or someone else did it to her," said Litelli. "Lady like that stirs up a lot of emotions. Meets the wrong kind of people, or sometimes even the right kind of people turn wrong. We may not get this guy."

The autopsy report was on his desk when he got back. Lois Moorehouse had died of a broken neck. The stomach contents indicated that she had died at about two in the morning. She had eaten a cheeseburger ("medium rare," the M.E. had scribbled in) with lettuce, tomato, pickle, and onion, a fruit salad with pieces of orange, grapefruit, cantaloupe, lemon, and pineapple in a syrup, and enough liquor to give her a blood alcohol content of .18. If she weren't dead, thought Litelli, we could have gotten her for driving while intoxicated. She'd have lost her license, but under the circumstances, not a bad tradeoff.

*"And then, I figured it out," said Litelli. Lopez looked puzzled.*

*"Figured what out?"*

*"Who did it. I didn't have*

*solid proof, but I knew who it was. Don't you get it?" He was grinning broadly. Lopez frowned, thinking. Then her face brightened.*

*"The fruit salad?" she said.*

*"Bingo," said Litelli.*

Litelli and Dunwell went back to Lenny's that night. The regulars had stayed home, apparently, so there were just a few transients seated at a table by the door. The two detectives sat at the bar instead of their usual table. Tom placed their drinks in front of them.

"What I like about this place is the service," said Dunwell. "You mix them better than anyone, Tom."

"If you don't take pride in your work, why bother?" said Tom.

"Exactly," agreed Litelli. "Which is why it's frustrating for us on this Moorehouse case. You sure you didn't get a good look at the guy's face?"

"I'm sorry, Vince, but I really didn't."

Litelli finished his drink. "Another?" said Tom.

"Hm," pondered Litelli. "Maybe I'll try something different. What was in those Manhattans?"

"One part dry vermouth to two parts bourbon or rye, poured over ice and stirred, serve it up in a Manhattan glass."

"Sounds good. She liked it with lime?"

"That isn't a proper Manhattan," said Tom. "Lime ruins it. The proper garnish is lemon, or maybe an olive."

"You're quite the perfectionist, aren't you?" said Dunwell.

"Pride in my work, as I said."

"She must have driven you crazy," sympathized Litelli. "Coming in with that attitude, and then ordering the drink the wrong way."

"Well . . ." said Tom.

"And she kept harping on it, didn't she?" said Dunwell.

"Yes, she did," said Tom.

"Not to mention what she was doing to your regulars," said Litelli. "I mean, first Jerry, then Cater, and she was gonna take out the dart guy next."

Tom was sweating.

"And the fight she started," said Dunwell. "Nobody ever got into a fight here until she came into the place."

"You see, Tom," said Litelli, "we understand why you did it. This place is you, Tom. Once a bar stops being a place to go, it dies. This was really just a self-defense thing, wasn't it?"

"Yes," whispered Tom.

"Talk to us, buddy," said Dunwell. "You know we'll try to help you on this one."

"She had done this to me once before," Tom began haltingly. "Another bar, about five years

ago. I loved her, but she dropped me, then kept coming to the bar with other men. She always ordered the Manhattans with the lime. She knew it drove me crazy. She drove our customers out. I lost the bar. Then I had to scrounge to save up enough to open this place. And just when it was going well, she showed up here a month ago. By accident, she told me, but she started playing the same games. I didn't want to lose this place, and I didn't want to see her destroying my customers. My customers. So, I waited for her, and I killed her."

He stopped, mixed a drink, a dry Manhattan, and topped it off with a slice of lemon. "It's really a great drink," he said, sipping it. "And the last thing I did before I killed her was I made her drink a real Manhattan. Just for the personal satisfaction, you see."

"We understand," said Litelli. "That's why, when I saw the lemon in the M.E.'s report, I knew you must have done it. No one puts lemon in a fruit salad. Could you come with us now, Tom?"

"And he came," said Litelli. "He really wasn't a violent guy. Just this one quirk. He copped to manslaughter, did eight years, and is out on parole. Unfortunately, convicted felons can't get bartenders' licenses."

"That's unfortunate?" said Lopez.

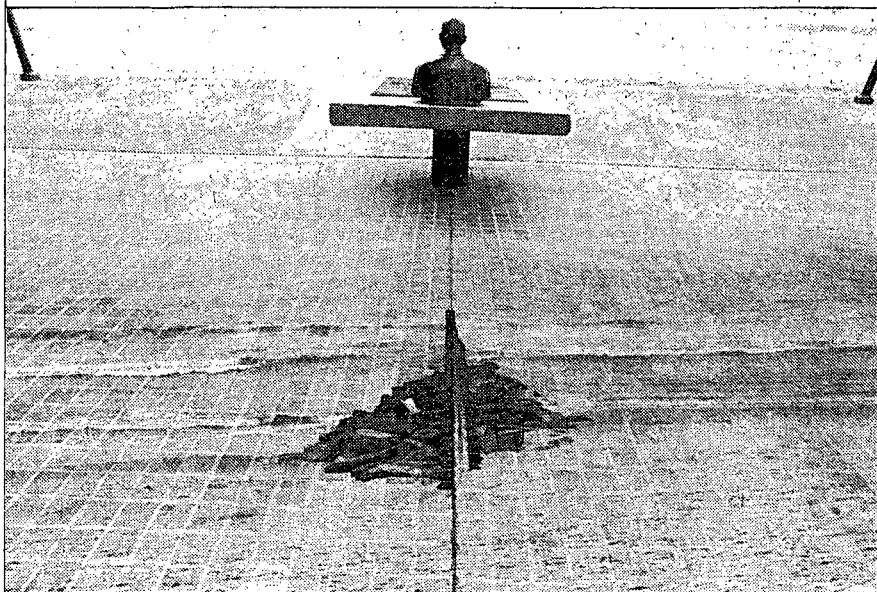
"He really was the best bartender I ever saw," said Litelli wistfully. "That's what tipped me off. He left his signature there. Not just the lemons. It was how she died. Just like her drink."

Lopez started laughing.

"With a twist," said Litelli. "With a twist."

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# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



*Photo by Algimantas Kezys*

Somebody made a splash. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the Mid-December Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.





# Atmosphere for Murder

by Greg Goldsmith

Illustration by Timothy Standish 9/18

**T**here is no such thing as the wrong side of the tracks. If there were, there would be a right side of the tracks, and anybody who lives near the tracks can tell you that both sides are rotten.

The thought came to me after I rolled my face to one side to get the cinders and gravel out of my mouth and nose. A train whistle penetrated my skull

and made me forget briefly the banging in my head. My bruised ribs made it easy to count every railroad tie and stone I was lying on. There was a steel rail under my left knee. When my nostrils cleared, I caught the stomach-wrenching odor of creosote and of something else. Something from my nightmares.

It was like falling out of bed

during a bad dream and discovering you have a hangover:

I decided to open an eye. The glare of the locomotive's headlight made me wish I hadn't, so I closed it and turned my head away from the light. I thought maybe a little more sleep would give the hangover time to run its course. I just couldn't get comfortable. It was then that I started thinking about the sides of railroad tracks and realized that I was on neither side of this pair; I was sprawled between them.

I suppose the train didn't really get as close to me as I thought at the time. It certainly didn't get as close as I later told people it had. But it was close enough that I didn't notice the pain I should have felt when I clawed my way over one rail and rolled down the gravel railroad bed and into the water and oil and God-knows-what below. As the train rumbled past my resting spot in the ditch, I reminisced about how I came to be lying there.

I'm Jess McBain, and I find out things. Thirty-six hours before I managed to miss the train, a lawyer named Paul Kramer had asked me to find out some things for a client of his who was in trouble with the state Department of Natural Resources. Over the phone Kramer told me that his client was George Purvis, owner of Fer-

guson Industries, an electroplating operation on the south side of town. The business involved the use of lots of acids and metal solutions, Kramer said, and the DNR people were suspicious about the way Purvis was disposing of the stuff when he was done with it. They had managed to infect a judge with their suspicions, and he had issued a search warrant for the premises and records of Ferguson Industries. Kramer predicted that his client would end up in court, and he wasn't sure whether it would be a civil or criminal case.

I agreed to meet the client at Kramer's office that same afternoon. I had never worked with Kramer before, so I spelled out for him my billing policy in court cases. For people like Purvis I get my money in advance. Three days' pay followed by three days' work followed by three days' pay and so on. At the end of the job I refund any pay that hasn't been followed by work. That's for rich people. When poor people are the defendants, I usually don't demand my money up front.

The difference has nothing to do with me being a nice guy. The reason I get the money early from rich people is that they tend to get sore when they lose—especially if they have a chance of spending time in one of those country clubs with chain

link fences. A client who doesn't get his bill until after justice has been done is often reluctant to pay for my contribution to the process. Poor people have about the same attitude, and they are usually headed for a less swanky institution with a less refined clientele, but they don't have much to say about my fee. Since they can't afford lawyers, they get public defenders. If the public defender needs my services, he can get the court to foot my bill. Collection is not a problem. I have always found the government willing—almost eager—to pay.

Kramer had explained my policy to Purvis, and I had a check for seven hundred and fifty dollars in my coat pocket before we made ourselves comfortable in Kramer's office. Purvis wasn't real happy about the arrangement, even though he was wearing shoes worth more than the check. He made me glad that I didn't have to like the people I worked for. He was fat and fiftyish and loud. I didn't know yet if he was a polluter by trade, but the smoke from his cigar proved that he polluted for fun.

"Socialism, that's what it is," he huffed between puffs. "Government thinks it can tell me how to run my own business on my own property."

"Tell him about the records, George," Kramer said.

"That's part of what I'm talkin' about. These state boys think they can tell me what kind of records I need to keep for my own business. Not only that, now they come in and say they got the right to look at every piece of paper in my files. And threatening to take me to court. Communism, that's what it is."

"You got all the records these Commies want?" I asked.

Purvis scowled at me through his smokescreen, trying to figure out if I was putting him on.

"Mr. Purvis has the records," Kramer answered for him. "But the DNR investigator claims he has information that indicates the records contain, uh, discrepancies."

"Bastard called me a liar," Purvis bellowed. "Said I falsified the logs. I should've wrung his skinny little neck."

"What are these logs?" I asked.

"In his business Mr. Purvis uses many chemicals that the state claims would cause dangerous ground pollution if not stored properly and disposed of properly."

"Notice that's my business and my ground," Purvis volunteered.

"At any rate," Kramer continued patiently, "the state requires that Mr. Purvis keep detailed records about where these chemicals are stored, when they were placed there, when they are moved, and how they

are disposed of. The DNR investigator appeared at the plant this morning with a search warrant. He said he plans to check the records and the chemicals at the plant and conduct tests on the soil."

"Are the records falsified?"

"Falsified!" Purvis came half out of his chair. "Whose side is he on, Kramer? He's as bad as those socialists. Think we can keep track of every tiny detail of every drop of acid or lead salts? Maybe I didn't have everything written down at the exact time we handled the stuff, but no sonuvabitch can come onto my property and call me a liar."

"What is it you want me to do?"

"We want you to observe closely . . ."

"We want you to watch every move that punk makes while he sneaks around my business. I want to know everything he looks at, everyone he talks to, and everything he says. When Kramer gets him on the witness stand, he'll be able to take every offhand remark or joke and wrap it around this guy's skinny little neck. I want a detailed report on my desk every morning."

Now he wants records, I thought. It sounded like they needed a stenographer instead of an investigator, but the work didn't sound too hard, and the

money was right. I decided that if the check didn't bounce, I'd take the job.

An hour later I was in Purvis's office in the heart of the city's industrial area—an old fashioned coal-fired, soot-encrusted, yellow-air smoke-stackville a mile wide, straddling a three mile stretch of the river. In the nineteenth century the industries of the day had picked the spot because the river meant cheap power and transportation as well as water. It was also a convenient sewer. Later, the railroads contributed piles of coal and pools of diesel fuel to the landscape, and by the last years of the twentieth century the only thing that grew there was the life-smothering algae that seemed to thrive in the river suds and slicks and hunks of debris that somehow made their way around the environmentalists' rules and slipped past the vigilance of the politicians, who periodically reported "significant improvement in the water quality without the loss of jobs."

It was a place to work. Not a place to live.

Purvis had been entertaining me with one of his tirades when his subject, DNR investigator Carson Holloway, barged into the office after a perfunctory knock. Purvis had bitten off the end of his cigar, and he was still choking on it while Holloway

and I introduced ourselves to each other.

"You must be the DNR bureaucrat," I said, making sure to smile as I extended my hand. "I'm Jess McBain, and Mr. Purvis here has asked me to observe your investigation so we can find out what needs to be done."

It wasn't really a lie.

"You must be the company's spy," Holloway said, matching my smile. "I'll try not to stop too quickly while you're following me around."

Holloway did have a skinny neck and a skinny everything else. He was three inches over six feet and couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and fifty pounds. I'm three inches under six feet and weigh a hundred seventy-five pounds if I haven't been drinking too much beer. I was going to look like Sancho Panza lockstepped behind Holloway's Don Quixote.

"You bastard," Purvis had recovered. "What makes you think you can bust in here like you own the place?"

Holloway pulled a folded piece of paper from his coat pocket and waved it slowly in front of his face. I had seen search warrants before. Purvis snarled, but sank back into his overstuffed swivel chair.

"Someday we'll meet when you can't hide behind a piece of

paper, and that's the day I'll wring your skinny neck."

If Purvis had been paying me to give advice, I would have suggested that he bring an assistant with his bloated, wheezing self when he decided to wring Holloway's skinny neck. There was firmness in his handshake that hinted at lean muscle under the baggy suit, and there was no flicker of fear in the eyes.

Holloway pulled a small notebook from his battered leather briefcase and sat down in the chair that I had been using before he came in. I stood close behind him, trying to loom ominously for my employer's benefit.

"So far," Holloway said, "I've just been wandering around ..."

"Sneaking around," Purvis spat.

"... getting a feel for the place. I want to spend the rest of the afternoon talking with the plant manager and the secretary who stores the records." He consulted his notebook. "That would be Larry Kincaid and Lucy Minnick."

"So go waste their time and quit wasting mine."

Holloway rose slowly and favored Purvis with a tight-lipped smile before turning toward the door. He put his hand on my shoulder, and with a mocking "Come, Watson. The game is

afoot," he stalked out of Purvis's office. I jumped after him, pausing to close the door gently while Purvis fumbled for a fresh cigar.

Lucy Minnick occupied the office through which you passed to get into Purvis's. She was part receptionist, part secretary, and part bookkeeper. She made a nice decoration for the anteroom, but there was a hard intelligence in her eyes that said she was not a trophy. She was probably nearing forty; and she wasn't afraid to let some gray highlight her short, black hair.

While I hovered behind him, pen to notebook, Holloway asked her about the chemical records.

"I frankly don't do much more than store them," she said. It was like a purr. "Larry—that's Mr. Kincaid, the plant manager—keeps track of all our supplies. He records what comes in, when it's used, and where it goes when we're done with it. I keep his records separated according to whether the chemical is still on the premises or not."

"And you keep them where?"

"Over here," she said, rising and gliding across the floor to a pair of steel, three-drawer file cabinets. She framed them with her hands, like she was showing us a prize on a TV game show.

Holloway pulled a huge roll of yellow tape from his briefcase and wrapped it around each drawer of each cabinet. It was the kind of tape that would shatter if you tried to remove it.

"Please consider these files sealed for the time being," Holloway told her.

"But Mr. Purvis will . . ."

"I know," Holloway smiled as he tucked the remaining tape into his briefcase and started out of the office. I looked at her and shrugged, then scrambled to catch up with Holloway.

We headed for Kincaid's office, and that meant passing through I'm not sure which circle of Hell. An electroplating plant would be a good place to teach children the concept of damnation. Men on narrow catwalks passed through fumes rising from vats the size of mobile homes. They used power winches to dunk metal objects—that day it was table frames—into the acids and other bubbling liquids. When they got to the vats of metallic solutions, an electric current was passed through the vat, bonding a molecule-thick layer of chrome or silver or whatever to the frame.

Several of the dozen or so workmen bore scars on their faces and arms, testimony to flesh-eating splashes from the vats. One man was badly scarred

on his chin and throat and on the back of his head and neck. He wore long sleeves and gloves despite the heat, and I was willing to bet that a fall into one of those vats had made a mottled mess of most of his skin.

Kincaid's office was four metal and glass walls in the middle of the operation. He was no happier than Purvis to see Holloway, but at least he didn't go on about it. He answered most of the questions with a grunted "yeah" or "uh-uh." He walked around his office staring through the windows. Almost as tall as Holloway, he had a beer drinker's belly but a football player's shoulders. He was in his mid-thirties, and he probably could have busted the heads of any of his younger workers. To stay in charge of a place like that, he probably often did.

Grudgingly he agreed to show us where the chemicals were stored behind the building. Not a word passed among us during the three-minute walk to the storage area, a hundred-foot square surrounded by chain link fence. The inside of the fence was lined with fifty-five-gallon drums, most of them stacked three high and covered with heavy tarps. Rickety wooden fences divided the area into about twenty bins. There was a single gate to allow delivery and removal. The ground was cinders, and I didn't fancy set-

ting foot into the watery mess to see if there were any man-eating chemicals spilled there. I just assumed there were. My eyes watered and my nose rebelled at the vapor that rose from the mess. The odor made me nervous.

Holloway pulled a pair of clear plastic boots from his briefcase. I wondered what else he had in there. He donned the boots and strode into the mire, tapping on the odd drum and tossing back the tarps on a couple of the stacks.

Kincaid growled. "Look, I ain't got all afternoon to nursemaid you two around this stuff." It was his first sentence.

Holloway surprised me by marching straight out of the storage area and back into the plant without saying or doing anything to irritate Kincaid. He was chirping as we headed back toward the front of the plant.

"Okay. I'm going to start looking over those records tomorrow morning. Sometime after that I'll need to check your stock."

"I ain't got time to . . ."

"Not to worry. Mr. McBain here has already been assigned to babysit me."

Kincaid didn't show that he had heard. As we passed his office, he went inside and shut the door. Holloway and I continued through the plant and



the offices and into the parking lot.

It was going on three thirty, and Holloway said he wanted to check into his hotel. We agreed to meet in the parking lot at nine the next morning. He got in his car and drove away, and I walked back inside to report to my client.

I never saw Carson Holloway alive again.

**A**t first I thought it was the shooting that had awakened me. Then I realized it was the telephone. I turned off the television, struggled out of my recliner, and stumbled to the phone. It was Paul Kramer. He didn't waste words. Unusual for a lawyer.

"That DNR investigator is dead, and the police have arrested George."

I swept the cobwebs and some ugly thoughts out of my mind. It was almost midnight.

"You talk to him yet?"

"Just long enough to tell him not to make a statement until he's talked to me."

"What have they got?"

"All I know is what they told George. It happened in his office. Night watchman in another plant heard shots and called the police. They found the office doors open, the lights on, and the DNR guy dead on the floor."

"His name was Holloway."

"Yeah. Anyway, the shooting was about ten o'clock, and the police went to George's house to see if he knew anything about it. He wasn't there, and his wife told them he had gone to the office. It was about ten thirty then, and George got home about fifteen minutes later. They asked him where he'd been, he clammed up, and they read him his rights. I'm headed down to the jail to talk to him. Can you meet me there?"

"I'll stop by the plant on the way. I may be able to get the cops to show me around."

I hung up without saying goodbye. Driving to the plant I thought about my job. I had taken an instant liking to Holloway, and my job was to ruin him on behalf of someone I loathed. Now someone—probably the guy I was working for—had made that job unnecessary and given me a new one: trying to save Purvis's fat neck from the wringer. As I always did at such times, I reminded myself that it was a job, not a religious quest for justice.

Jack Blanchard and I arrived at the murder scene at the same time. He was a retired police detective sergeant in the homicide division who had found his second career as an investigator in the county prosecutor's office. Each of us knew the other played it straight, so we

got along about as well as people on opposite sides of every case could.

He didn't say a word to me. Instead he disappeared inside, leaving me outside the yellow crime scene tape that had been strung up like crepe paper at a party. Five minutes later he came out.

"You on officially?" he asked.

"The guy you've got in jail has me on the payroll for at least two more days on another case, and I just talked with his lawyer about this one."

"Okay," Blanchard said. "I'll let you have a quick look around after they've finished with the photos. They're still dusting for prints, so don't touch anything. What's the other case?"

We had entered that delicate stage of negotiations in which I had to decide what I was willing to give that I didn't have to give so I could get what Blanchard didn't have to give, like a tour of a warm murder scene. If I were going to be candid I'd have said something like: "Oh, the guy you've got in jail was afraid he'd go to prison unless someone found a way to neutralize the guy who's in there waiting for a body bag. He hired me to help out." I also knew stonewalling wouldn't do any good. The prosecution would find out eventually that Purvis had a great motive for murder. Besides, Blanchard didn't go

out in the middle of the night on every crummy homicide; the fact that he was there showed that somebody knew who Holloway was and what he might have been up to.

What I told Blanchard was: "Purvis wanted me to find out if there was anything to some allegations that have been made about somebody violating anti-pollution laws at the plant. The man in there was checking into the same allegations for the Department of Natural Resources."

Blanchard snorted. He knew I'd put a lot of spin on the truth, but he also realized that it wasn't a lie. It was enough to get me under the yellow tape.

Holloway was in Purvis's office, sprawled on the floor against the wall that separated it from Lucy Minnick's. He had been shot in the chest. Blood from the exit wound had soaked the back of his suit coat, and a spatter on the wall indicated that he had been standing almost against the wall when he was shot. He had also been shot in the temple, and the spatter across the floor indicated that he had already fallen—may have already been dead—when that wound was inflicted.

"Once in the heart, once in the head," Blanchard said. "Isn't that supposed to be some sort of Mafia tradition?"

"Who knows. No weapon?"

"Nope. Looks like it's going to be a light to medium caliber, though. The slug that went through his body had shattered by the time it hit the wall. We'll see what's left of the other one after we move the body."

I noticed that Holloway's shoes were covered with cinders and mud and other gunk. It hadn't rained in days, and I was willing to bet that he had been out back in the chemical storage area before he came into the office. I didn't see any reason to mention it to Blanchard. I excused myself, saying I had clients to meet. On the way out, I noticed the fingerprint man dusting Lucy Minnick's file cabinets. Someone had ripped Holloway's evidence tape off the cabinets and left it in tiny pieces on the floor.

It looked like something Purvis might do.

**A**s a matter of fact, Purvis had done it. He admitted it to me and Kramer while we sat in the interview cell at the county jail. He had become more blubber than bluster, and all he wanted to do was go home. I managed to keep from smirking while Kramer explained that there would be no bail set until after a preliminary hearing. Maybe not then.

"But I didn't kill him," Purvis whimpered, probably echoing

the plea of thousands of killers in thousands of police stations.

"Well, you told your wife you were at your office, and a man was killed there," Kramer said gently, making the statement sound like a question and finishing with a cock of his head that was an obvious invitation for Purvis to come out with an alternate scenario. Most lawyers won't invent a story for their clients to tell a jury. It's called subornation of perjury, and judges will put you in prison for it. But if the client comes up with the lie on his own . . .

After staring at the floor for a full sixty seconds, Purvis sighed and said, "I was only at the office a few minutes. The rest of the time I was at Lucy Minnick's apartment."

It wasn't the best alibi in the world, and I knew it probably wouldn't persuade the prosecutor to drop the charge, but there was a chance some jurors would buy it, at least as the "reasonable doubt" they're supposed to look for.

Purvis told us that Minnick had been his mistress for a little over a year. She had gotten into some sort of financial trouble, Purvis had started slipping an extra five hundred a week into her pay envelope, and he had himself a girlfriend. It was just the sort of romance I would have envisioned for him.

He said he had gone to the

office just as he told his wife, but he stayed only long enough to get mad about the tape on the cabinet. He said he tore it off and left, going straight to Minnick's house where he passed a pleasant hour before going home and into the web of his own deceit. Those weren't his exact words.

"If I explain that to the police do you think they'll let me out tonight?"

"I doubt it," Kramer said. "But it's possible that giving them a statement now will look good to the judge when he considers setting bail, and it might look good to the jury if we have to go to trial."

I frowned and let Kramer see that I was frowning. Prisons are full of people who couldn't keep their mouths shut. Like Purvis, they thought that the nice policemen would take care of everything if they just told their stories. One killer might come up with an explanation for why the dead guy had to be killed; another would come up with a great lie. At the trial, the first guy would have his statement wrapped around his neck as a confession; the other would end up stumbling all over the witness stand, grasping for more lies to back up the original.

Either Kramer didn't practice a lot of criminal law or his judgment was clouded. He was

going to let Purvis talk. I suggested that I go talk to Lucy Minnick first, just to make sure she was going to back up what Purvis had to say.

"Sure she will," Purvis wailed. He was really eager to gab. Kramer agreed with me, but he was willing to help his client scratch the itch.

"You go over to Minnick's place now," he told me. "I'll get everything set up so George can begin his statement as soon as you give me a call and tell me that everything is okay with Minnick."

My suggestion that we wait until morning when we might be thinking more clearly was overruled, and fifteen minutes later I was at the address Purvis had given me. It was in one of those twenty acre clusters of three story, twelve-unit buildings that line the freeways on the outskirts of large cities. Actually, it took me fifteen minutes to get near the address and another fifteen to figure out which of the identical buildings was my target. According to her mailbox, L. Minnick's apartment was Number 11, which meant it was on the top floor. She didn't answer when I buzzed, even on the fifth long buzz. I was trying to decide whether to get to a phone and warn Kramer to postpone Purvis's recital or to see what happened to someone who hit

all the buzzers at two in the morning. My mind was made up for me when a tipsy resident came wandering in. I thoughtfully helped him get his key into the security door lock.

I tapped gently on the door to Number 11, and it drifted open. It took me a second to realize that it was my tapping, not someone pulling, that had opened the door. The room was lit by a pair of table lamps. Lucy Minnick was sprawled on the couch in what would have been an inviting pose if it weren't for the blood. One in the heart, one in the head, and Lucy no longer had good looks or intelligence.

I stepped inside and closed the door. Someone had yanked the drawers from a writing desk and a filing cabinet next to the desk, and the floor was littered with sheets of paper. I stepped quietly across the living room to the bedroom. I flipped on the light switch, all the while wishing that I routinely carried the .38 Police Special that was now in its holster and hanging on a peg in my hall closet. The bedroom had been tossed, too. Drawers from her nightstand and dresser had been dumped on the bed. The closet was open, but her clothing was still hanging there. I held my breath and listened for breathing. I didn't hear any. I didn't really expect to find anyone. Lucy's blood

was almost dried. Besides, anyone who had been there would probably have been scared off by my buzzing.

As I took my search to the kitchen, someone buzzed. It was then that I realized that getting out undetected wouldn't be easy. There was only one stairway down, no place to go up and no place to hide in the hallways. I threw the night latch on the door. I had started to turn out the lights when I noticed the corner of a file folder behind the couch cushion beside Lucy's head. I pulled it out, being careful to hold it between my fingernails so as not to leave fingerprints. Inside were copies of letters from Minnick to the Department of Natural Resources and replies from the DNR. The last one was from Holloway. This was stuff that Purvis would have ransacked the apartment to find. Lucy Minnick must have been reading it when her killer came in, and she had hidden it behind the cushion she was sitting on.

Someone knocked on the door. I kept quiet and leafed quickly through the letters. Minnick had told the DNR that something funny was going on at Ferguson Industries with the way chemicals went in and out of the plant.

The knock was louder.

"Hey, McBain. I know you're in there. I saw your car."

It was Jack Blanchard. I slipped the folder back where I found it and opened the door. Blanchard growled as he entered the room.

"What the hell are . . ."

He saw the body and the rest of the mess and had his gun in his hand before I could get the door shut. He leveled it at me.

"Whoa," I said, pushing my hands toward Blanchard in a gesture that meant whoa, but which also showed that my hands were empty. "I didn't do this. I'm here on the case. Besides, she's been dead for hours."

Blanchard glanced at the body and lowered the gun. He didn't put it away.

"I came over to check on Purvis's alibi," he said, glancing around the room and missing my wince. So Kramer had let him go ahead and talk. "Looks like she's not going to help him on the Holloway killing. Let's see now, he says he was here all evening. You know, I think you're right, McBain. This body does look like it's been here for several hours."

He picked up a bed pillow and displayed it to me. The black burn marks meant that it had been wrapped around the gun as a makeshift silencer.

"This ain't gonna help Purvis show self-defense," Blanchard said cheerfully.

He checked the other rooms, then put his gun away and

picked up the phone. He put in a call for a patrol car and for a homicide team. I asked if I could call Kramer at the jail.

"No need for that," Blanchard cooed. "As soon as a detective gets here, I'll take you to the jail myself. I've got business there, too."

An hour later, while I watched, Blanchard read his Miranda rights card to a bemused Purvis.

"I don't get it," Purvis said. "You already read me my rights when you arrested me and again just before I gave the statement."

"Yeah, but that was when we were talking about the murder of Carson Holloway. I am now placing you under arrest for the murder of Lucy Minnick."

Purvis was quiet the rest of the time I was there. Kramer told him not to say anything or answer any questions. I let Kramer see my eyes roll. Blanchard said I could leave, but that he might want to talk to me about tampering with a crime scene. Kramer agreed to drive me to my car, and we were silent during the whole trip. Blessed silence. When he let me out, I agreed to meet him at one that afternoon at his office.

It was four thirty in the morning when I crawled into bed. Tired as I was, I had a hard time going to sleep. The faces of Carson Holloway and Lucy

Minnick kept popping into my head. Sometimes they had holes in them. Then I thought about Purvis in jail and what a hard time he was having getting to sleep. Somehow it made me feel better, and I drifted off.

**A**t first glance Suzan Purvis was strikingly beautiful. The longer you studied her the more you realized that "well-preserved" was what her friends would call her, and "product of the surgeon's art" was what her non-friends would call her. The first glance said she was around forty, and the long study suggested at least fifty-five or sixty. She was expensively and tastefully dressed in a tailored blue suit. The pearls around her neck were no doubt real, and she wasn't trying to be flashy. I couldn't picture her married to George Purvis.

We sat side by side in front of Kramer's desk as she told me, "I'll pay whatever fees and expenses you require to prove my husband's innocence."

Her voice was husky, and her pale blue eyes were steady and cold. It was no time to tell her that proving innocence wasn't something that I was likely to do. I did tell her that her husband had already paid my fees for the next two days and that they didn't vary whether the charge was littering or murder.

She turned to Kramer.

"What amount will I need for bail?"

"Well, there's very little chance that we can get bail set," he said. "We've got a preliminary hearing at two thirty, and the judge will decide then. I'm going to talk with George just before the hearing, and you can visit with him then if you like. In the meantime, why don't you tell Mr. McBain everything that happened last night while I do some research. You can use this office. I'll be in the library, across the hall."

He left us alone and I pulled out my notebook and pen.

"George got home from work about six thirty last night, and we went to Ciccinelli's for dinner at seven."

"Did you talk to anyone at dinner?"

"I didn't, really, but George ran into a couple of business acquaintances while we were waiting in the cocktail lounge. He told them something about a—I'm not using the exact words he did—a person from the government who was prying into his private business."

"Did the words 'wring his skinny neck' come up?"

She sighed and nodded. I wondered how long before one or both of these barroom buddies would be on the phone to the police. Purvis was not the type to engender affection in



business acquaintances.

"We got home about nine fifteen," she continued, "and George remembered a couple of things he had to do at the office. He'd been gone about an hour and a half when the police came. I think you know the rest."

I guessed I did, and I suddenly wondered if she did. Had Kramer told her about her husband's alibi? It was one of those delightful moments in human relationships when you stop breathing and tighten your jaw to keep from talking while you figure out what you're supposed to say. As with most such moments it ended with the guy who knew too much deciding it wasn't any of his business.

I had her fill in a couple of blanks, like the names of the guys Purvis had macho-mouthed to. I started to get up, but she stopped me, putting her right hand on top of my left one.

"Mr. McBain, I'll do whatever needs to be done and pay whatever money it takes to get my husband out of this mess."

There it was for the third time. She'd pay. She'd pay the fees or the bail or whatever it takes. I began to wonder about the Purvis family finances. And some other things.

I put my right hand over hers and patted it gently in a possessively protective way that would have irritated most of

the women I like. She gave me a brief smile, then pulled her hand away as Kramer came into the room.

"We've got an hour before the hearing," he said. "I'll walk you over to the courthouse and get you in to see George if you like, Suzan."

She nodded, and then left. I didn't get a chance to find out if Kramer had told her about Lucy Minnick. Maybe he had also decided it was none of his business and was leaving the telling of the tale to the husband. Purvis couldn't rationalize about whose business it was, but I would have bet that he didn't have the guts to tell the story while those icy eyes froze him. Anyway, it was none of my business.

I decided to spend the hour profitably at the newspaper office. I walked into the *Clarion* newsroom right on one of their deadlines. Jim Carson, the city editor, groaned when he saw me. I told him I just wanted to look through the clipping files. He looked relieved that I didn't expect any conversation, and he waved me through to the library. In the old days they called it the morgue. I told the librarian that I wanted the files on George Purvis, Suzan Purvis, Jerry Kincaid, Lucy Minnick, and Ferguson Industries. She came back with four folders. Lucy Minnick had apparently

not been important enough to get into the newspaper. I knew they'd have a file on her by the next day.

The thickest of the folders was for Suzan Purvis—Suzan Ferguson Purvis. Most of it was society stuff on what she liked to wear and eat. There was a yellowed clipping about her taking over Ferguson Industries when her father, Samuel J. Ferguson, died. That was in 1957, and she was twenty-six years old. That made her fifty-nine. There was a 1982 clipping about her wedding. She apparently turned the company over to Purvis then, because it was after that that she started showing up in the society columns as a lady of leisure.

George Purvis's folder contained only the clippings that I had already seen in his wife's. He usually got a single mention in each article. Something like: "Her husband, George, is chief executive officer of Ferguson Industries." Kramer had said he was the owner, but it looked to me as if he worked for his wife. The wedding clipping gave the most information about Purvis. He had graduated from a Philadelphia high school the year after his future wife took over the company. They met in Atlantic City, where he was employed in one of the casinos. When Jack Blanchard heard that, he'd be on the "one in the

heart, one in the head" bandwagon.

The only clipping on the company, besides the one about Suzan Ferguson taking over, was a 1943 article about Samuel J. Ferguson, armed with a government loan, opening the plant "to contribute his part to the defeat of the Axis powers."

There was only one clipping about Kincaid. It seems that in 1979, at the age of twenty-seven, he had been shot in the leg during an attack by one motorcycle gang on another's clubhouse. The clubhouse belonged to the Outlaw Angels, a collection of outcasts from two well-known gangs. The spinoffs were supposed to be the worst apples from each barrel. Kincaid was identified as "an associate" and not a member of the Outlaw Angels.

Being involved in shootings and gangs didn't make him someone we could pin the killings on, but Kramer might be able to sprinkle some implications in front of the jury. All we needed was that reasonable doubt. The preliminary hearing was another matter. There all the prosecutor would need was "probable cause" to believe that Purvis had committed a crime. They sure had that.

When I got off the elevator on the third floor of the courthouse, I saw Kate Irwin talking with Blanchard. I almost felt

sorry for Purvis. Irwin was the prosecuting attorney, and her presence outside the circuit courtroom meant that she was handling the case herself rather than having it assigned to a deputy. She would butcher Kramer in the courtroom.

She and I were on friendly terms for business opponents, and when she spotted me approaching the courtroom, she gave me her brightest smile. That smile and the fact that she was barely over five feet tall made a lot of people, particularly defense lawyers, take her lightly. She looked a lot bigger when the teeth were in her victim's jugular.

"Jess. Jack told me you were on this one. Doesn't look like it's going to be much of a fight, though."

"You never can tell," I replied, demonstrating that I was still a master of the witty comeback.

She opened the courtroom door and with a flourish that said, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," waved me in. Kramer and Purvis were seated at one of the two tables in the arena section. Mrs. Purvis was in the gallery behind them. I wondered if she knew yet.

Irwin and Blanchard took their seats at the other table just in time to hop back to their feet as the court reporter, bailiff, and Circuit Court Judge

Robert Barden entered the room. I liked working in Barden's court because he was the best of the dozen judges with felony jurisdiction. He knew the law and allowed no nonsense. It was usually bad news for my clients, though; a well-run trial usually winds up with an accurate verdict that stands up to appeals. He handed down some stiff sentences, too.

I was sitting next to Suzan Purvis and was watching her from the corner of my eye when the charges were read. She was composed and still while Irwin read the charge that Purvis had killed Carson Holloway. When the reading went into the second count and Lucy Minnick's name came up, the surprised wife or the irritated wife stiffened slightly. I still couldn't tell.

In a preliminary hearing the prosecutor presents what evidence she believes is sufficient to have the defendant held for trial. The real witnesses need not appear and the judge will generally assume that the prosecution can produce any tangible evidence it says it has. In this case Blanchard took the witness stand and testified about finding Holloway's body. He explained who Holloway was and what he was doing there. He said that Purvis had admitted illegally dumping chemicals into the soil around the Ferguson

Industries property, that he had admitted threatening Holloway, and that he admitted being in his office that evening. He said that Purvis had denied being in the office when Holloway was killed, but that led him to Purvis's disastrous alibi.

When Blanchard got to the part about why Purvis was visiting Minnick, I was watching Mrs. Purvis again. Her mouth remained frozen, but cold flames leaped from her eyes. I decided that nobody had told her.

I returned my interest to Blanchard. He was telling Judge Barden about the autopsies. He said a bullet had been recovered from Minnick's body and another from her couch. A third was found in the carpet under Holloway's head. He said all three were fired from a .38 caliber weapon. He said a .38 caliber revolver was registered to one George Purvis, and that its whereabouts had not been learned by police. I leaned forward and whispered to Kramer. He whispered to Purvis, who whispered to Kramer, who whispered to me that the gun was kept in Purvis's desk in his office. If it had been there, the police would have found it.

When Blanchard finished, Irwin asked the judge to order Purvis held for trial. Barden agreed and scheduled an arraignment. It was Kramer's turn.

"Your Honor, we would like to request that bail in a reasonable sum be set. We are prepared to show that Mr. Purvis has substantial ties to the community and that there is no serious criminal activity in his background."

I took a mental note to ask if that meant he had a non-serious criminal background; then I remembered that Purvis had admitting violating anti-pollution laws. I decided it was someone else's job to decide what "serious" is.

Irwin started to argue against the bail motion, but Barden waved her off.

"Normally, Mr. Kramer, I require written motions for setting of bail in a murder case. I suggest that you not waste your or the court's time in preparing one."

"At least he didn't say no," I said to Kramer as we filed out of the courtroom. He was not amused and started to say something about taking a serious case seriously. I said I had work to do and hopped into step with Blanchard. There was a man in the hallway I wanted to ask him about. He had been in the courtroom, but he wasn't one of the reporters or lawyers or other courthouse lieabouts you normally see at hearings. He was a beefy six feet, had a heavy beard, and was wearing a dirty T-shirt, leather jeans,

and sunglasses. He was getting on the elevator when I pointed him out to Blanchard.

"I don't know him," Blanchard said. "He looks like a lot of guys you see in the courthouse, but they're usually in custody. Maybe he's a friend of some defendant in another case. He doesn't look like he moves in Purvis's social circles."

Then he laughed and said, "At least not in his old social circles. Since yesterday Purvis has been hanging out with a whole new class of people."

He was still laughing when he turned into the prosecutor's office. I had already agreed to call Kramer the next morning, so I headed for home. As I was pulling my car out of the parking garage, the guy from the courtroom drove past. He was on a Harley-Davidson as big as some cars. On a whim, I followed him.

The heavy late-afternoon traffic made it easy to stay within a half block of him without being noticed. We drove out of the center of town and into the industrial area. He pulled to the curb, dismounted, and steadied his bike while I watched from two hundred yards away. He went into a bar across the street from the Ferguson Industries electroplating plant.

The Caboose was one of those narrow, wooden-floor taverns that sell bottles of beer and

shots of whisky to the factory workmen before starting time, at lunchtime, and after quitting time. I sat in my car trying to decide how best to conform to the dress code. Wearing my coat and tie, I would be as conspicuous as a circus clown at an Amish funeral. Taking them off would make me look like someone who had taken off his coat and tie so as not to look conspicuous.

I went as a clown.

Coming in from the sunny street to the smoky darkness of the windowless room left me blind for several seconds. I couldn't see anyone, but I could hear the drone of a half-dozen conversations dying quickly as I stood in the doorway. The jukebox was playing a country-western song about honky-tonks, excessive drinking, and faithless women. When my vision returned, I could see that I was the center of attention. The men at the twenty-stool bar gradually moved their stares away from me and back to each other or to their cigarettes or to that nothing-at-all that occupies the space just behind and slightly above every bar in the world.

At a wooden table in the farthest corner of the room was my biker. His glare widened to gaping surprise, and he whispered something to one of the other three men at the table. The one

he was talking to was Larry Kincaid.

There didn't seem to be any point in trying to blend in, so I walked back to the table like I'd been looking for my old buddies. I had decided I would ask Kincaid something about Purvis's office and the missing gun. I was, after all, working for his boss. I didn't even get a chance to say hello.

"You don't belong' in here, snoop," Kincaid snarled. "I might have to listen to you across the street, but nobody, including me, is working over there today."

One of the two I hadn't seen before jumped to his feet.

"Yeah. Who do you think you are, following us around and coming onto our turf with your suit and shoes? Hey, stick to the lounge lizard scene with the tight butt office types and don't be hanging out in the people's country or you'll end up with your head in your shoes."

It had taken about two seconds for him to get that out, then he sat down and sneered at me, muttering something I couldn't hear. There was an alcohol smell about him that didn't come from the beer that he was drinking. It was a smell I didn't like. Something that scared me.

He must have noticed that I was paying attention to him, because with a "Hey!" he came to his feet again. Kincaid

reached up and put an arm on his elbow.

"It's okay, Doc," he said. "The tourist was just leaving. Weren't you, snoop?"

"Yeah." It was the first word I had spoken since I left Blanchard at the courthouse. I backed away the first couple of steps, then turned and walked the length of the bar, knowing that as I passed each stool, the head of the occupant turned to watch my back. I wondered if they could see that the hair on the back of my neck was standing up in anticipation of an attack. It didn't go down until I was on the sidewalk, blinking in the sun.

It had been a productive visit. I knew that Kincaid was interested enough in his boss's court proceedings to send an observer. I knew that he still hung out with bikers. I was willing to bet that the guy I had followed had taken off his Outlaw Angels jacket for the trip to the courthouse. I also knew that Kincaid was much more hostile than he should have been to the man who was trying to help his boss get out of jail.

Walking back to my car, I stared across the street at Ferguson Industries. I couldn't see behind the plant where the drums of chemicals were stored, but I knew that Carson Holloway had been looking around in that yard and that it had cost

him his life. I wanted a look myself, and I didn't want anyone to know I was looking. I decided to do it the same way Carson Holloway had.

By nine o'clock it was dark enough for my visit. I was wearing dungarees, a dark shirt, and a denim jacket—a combination that might have gotten me into The Caboose with considerably less fanfare. Under the jacket, my revolver gave me the sense of security that stupid men get just before the earth swallows them.

I parked three blocks and around a couple of corners from the plant. As I approached it, I noticed that The Caboose was closed. Nobody stayed in that neighborhood very long after working hours.

I should have been alone, but I wasn't. There were three of them, and they had backed a rental truck—the size for moving three or four rooms of furniture—alongside the plant and next to the storage area. I could hear their heavy breathing and grunts, but I didn't hear anyone speak. My gun was in my hand as I knelt beside the truck cab and watched. They were rolling barrels out of the storage area and up a metal ramp into the truck. I had just decided to slip away and find a phone when the earth swallowed me.

I never did find out what hit me. It might have been a brick that almost ran me over.

or a pipe or a gun barrel. What it felt like was pain. I didn't pass out, but I dropped to my hands and knees and was fighting to stay awake when something—probably a booted foot—slammed into my ribs. That put me all the way down on my face. Someone stomped on my right wrist and jerked the gun out of my hand. I think he thought I was unconscious; I wasn't going to correct him.

The next few seconds were filled with angry hisses. I caught a few snatches.

"Another one."

"Gotta get it done tonight."

"Snoop."

One of my companions was Larry Kincaid. It was his voice that I heard suggest "an accident for this one." A minute or two later someone rolled me over and poured what smelled like whisky on me. Someone said, "Suppose he wakes up?"

There was a pause. Someone walked away and came back. I could smell horror. It was on the cloth that someone was pressing on my mouth and nose. Lights circled behind my eyelids, and blind, mindless, uncompromising panic overtook me. I was being smothered. I was being drowned. I was being buried alive. "Grab him!" was the last thing I heard until I woke up on the tracks and heard the whistle of the train



Lying in that watery ditch while the train crawled past, I thought about nightmares. I thought about when I was ten and broke my arm and the doctor gave me ether so he could set it and I went so crazy that two nurses couldn't keep me from punching the doctor with my broken arm. It was a reaction to ether that had caused me to panic then, and again when Kincaid was knocking me out. It was ether that gave Larry Kincaid the motive to kill Carson Holloway.

Ether is the base for crank, a sort of monster-made cocaine synthetically produced in back-room labs. It's easy and cheap to make, and a motorcycle gang could distribute it at a nice profit. The hard part is hiding large supplies of ether. The odor is a dead giveaway. Kincaid had found the perfect hiding spot in the middle of the witch's brew stored behind the plant. The lab was probably near the plant. At night in that neighborhood you could set fire to live skunks and no one would notice.

Kincaid had been moving the ether and maybe some other ingredients for his recipes when Holloway dropped by to see if anyone might try to do what Kincaid was doing. I decided that Holloway probably didn't know what he was getting into. These were sneaky, greedy

criminals who didn't mind poisoning children's blood and brains. He thought he was dealing with sneaky, greedy criminals who didn't mind poisoning children's water and air. It comes to the same thing, but what he didn't realize was that he was dealing with someone who would kill for the profit. I didn't know if Purvis would or not, but I knew for sure that Kincaid would.

It was then that I realized that Kincaid wouldn't quit trying to kill me. He would certainly have stuck around to see if his half-baked drunk-on-the-tracks accident had worked. When it hadn't, he would have moved to finish me. I was just lucky that the train had come between us.

It was beginning to pick up speed as I crawled out of the ditch and got level with the tracks. Looking under the train I could see two heads bobbing on the other side. They were looking for me. In my condition I didn't like my chances of surviving what I had decided to do, but they were considerably better than waiting for the train to get out of the way. Staggering to my feet, I lurched for a handhold on a passing coal car. I missed and went stumbling to my knees. I saw the flash of a shot being fired under the train. It missed, whining off the rail closest to me.

I was on my feet again. I grabbed the metal ladder on a tank car and held on. It dragged me along, my toes playing the washboard on the railroad ties, until I was able to pull myself clear of the ground and get my feet into the rungs. I thought I heard a couple more shots, and I wondered vaguely if a bullet might put a hole in the tank and what might get out. Being carried at twenty miles an hour away from the guns, I considered the tank car easily the safest place I had been for some time.

When I was maybe a mile from my loading zone, I unloaded myself beside a gas station. The attendant saw the maneuver, and you would think it was the first time he'd seen a soaking wet man wearing rags jump backwards off a moving train. He gaped at me from his doorway while I used the pay phone next to the soda pop machine. I had one quarter, so I was able to pay for the call to Blanchard. That was to summon the cavalry. I had to make my second call collect. That was to Kramer, and it was to satisfy my ethical sense that I should notify my client of what was going on before I told the police, which I sort of already had. It took a while to explain things to Kramer, and when I was done I think he was considering the remarkable possibility that

Purvis might not be guilty. That was when I started to contemplate the idea, too.

I decided to call a friend about getting me some dry clothes for what would probably be another long night at the police station. I was just giving the operator instructions when I realized that I had underestimated Kincaid. My first clue was the gun barrel in my back. My second was when I heard his hiss of a voice tell me to hang up.

The attendant had ducked inside his glass house and was probably hiding on the floor while Kincaid grabbed what was left of my jacket and jerked me into the shadows beside the station.

"Give me your wallet," he growled.

"Huh?"

"This is gonna look like just another mugging," he said, and I realized that he was still trying to kill me without another murder's being connected to the electroplating plant. That meant he didn't know I had already blown the whistle.

"I know why you killed the DNR guy," I said, taking my wallet out of my front pants pocket and handing it over my shoulder. "But why'd you kill Lucy Minnick?"

"Because I hate snoops. Holloway was dumb enough to tell me that somebody from the

company knew he was there, and I knew who it had to be. She was always asking questions about stuff she shouldn't know. I was right, too."

I had a vision.

"You found that file folder in Minnick's apartment and left it there on purpose, didn't you? When you realized they didn't know about the drug angle, you left the letters there as evidence against Purvis."

"Smart snoop. Now turn around slow."

Kincaid backed up three steps. He aimed carefully at my chest, exaggerating for the effect he thought it was having on me.

"Hold it."

I always figured you couldn't hear the shot that hit you—that the pain would take all your attention. At first I thought I had been wrong about that. I heard the shot. Then I realized that I didn't feel any pain at all. Then I realized that no fire had jumped out of the barrel of Kincaid's gun. Then I realized that Kincaid wasn't there any more. He had been knocked sideways into the dirt.

"You owe us," Blanchard yelled from across the station lot. He was standing behind a uniformed cop who was kneeling on the asphalt and pointing a smoking revolver at the spot where Kincaid had been.

"Was that you who yelled, 'Hold it'?" I asked Blanchard a

few minutes later as we sat in his car and I drank a cup of vending machine coffee.

"You think Kincaid was a ventriloquist?"

"Well, I've never been murdered before, and I wasn't sure how my senses would accept it all. How's he doing?"

The ambulance had already carted Kincaid away.

"He'll never make it. Richardson's a good shot. I'd say the bullet took him just below the right armpit and went through the heart and at least one lung." He changed the subject. "That truck was gone by the time our guys got to the plant, but we found several drums of ether, just like you said. Got any idea where we might find the rest of the stuff and the rest of your playmates?"

"You might be able to sniff them out around here. Your best bet is to get a line on a guy they call Doc. He hangs out at The Caboose, and you can bet he's their chemistry major. He smells like ether, and his brain is scrambled from bending over his cooking."

"I suppose you figure this is gonna get Purvis off," Blanchard said as he drove me to my place so I could clean up.

"Sure. Shouldn't it?"

"Well, it doesn't mean that Purvis wasn't in on it."

But I could tell he was depressed. Unless Kincaid sur-

vived and implicated Purvis, there wouldn't be enough evidence to justify prosecuting Purvis. While I was changing clothes, Blanchard called the hospital and found out that the case had collapsed—a victim of Richardson's marksmanship.

The final decision was made the next morning when Kate Irwin reviewed the evidence and decided to drop the murder charges. I found out about it around noon when Kramer called, waking me up from the sleep that was helping me recover from the beating and the two hours of statement-giving at the police station.

"So our boy is back home explaining things to the wife," I said.

"Well, no, he's not. He's still in jail."

"What?"

"Well, he's in the clear for the killings, but now Irwin has charged him with felony counts of criminal recklessness for illegal dumping."

I wished I could have watched her filling out the paperwork.

"You still want me working on the defense team?"

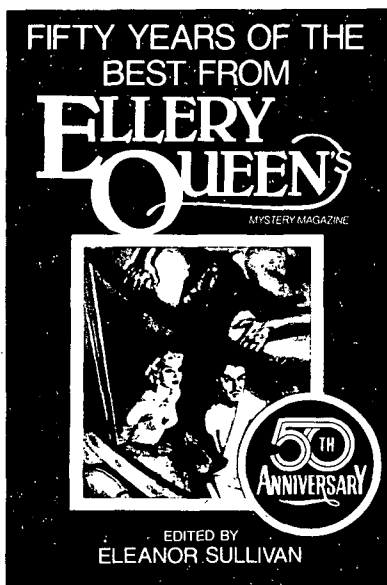
"Well, I don't think there will be much defense to it. In the statement he gave that first night he pretty much confessed to what's in these charges. Besides, I won't be handling it. It was his wife who was paying me, so I really can't represent him now, since I'll be representing her in the divorce. But I did agree to perform a final task for Mr. Purvis. He's desperate for bail money. Mrs. Purvis has cleaned out his cash sources, and his credit won't be very good because he's not likely to get anything in the divorce settlement. I drew up a prenuptial agreement myself."

I was shaking my head in amazement, and a tiny spark of pity for Purvis flared in my heart.

"Anyway," Kramer continued, "Mr. Purvis asked me to tell you that since you put less than forty-eight hours on his case, he figures you owe him a two fifty refund for the third day's pay."

My faith was restored, and the spark was doused. I suggested to Kramer that Purvis sue me.

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# UNSOLVED

by  
Ken Weber

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the June issue.*

An hour after the brief storm had passed, the boys were still treating the situation as a lark. The fact that the counselor had still not regained consciousness failed to impress them. The younger ones were a bit anxious, but they took their cue from the older, more experienced campers, who had been through this kind of thing before. The older ones knew that every canoe trip at Camp Boshkung had an "incident," and that it was just a matter of time before the counselor would come around.

Only Steve Calumet was a bit worried, though he didn't admit it to the others. Early that morning, when the four canoes had turned right out of Boshkung Lake and into the sun at marker buoy 77, he'd had an uncomfortable feeling. In his six summers—he was the most experienced camper, now fifteen years old—they had never canoed up this way because it was so easy to get lost. There were too many lakes and rivers in this section, and the charts were hard to read accurately because of shifting, swampy areas.

Steve was also the only camper who knew the counselor had broken the rules by not giving the trip plan to at least one other person. All any of the campers knew was that this trip was called the Boshkung Mystery Rectangle. Along the way they would change direction four times. The first three would be called by the counselor. The fourth change would be up to the campers. If they turned in the right direction at the correct marker buoy they would be home for supper. A wrong turn made the trip an overnigher or—at the discretion of the counselor—even longer.

It was a challenge and Steve liked that. But the blatant safety violation bothered him a lot.

Still, until the windstorm the trip had been very smooth and the boys were in a great mood. They had paddled with the current for over two hours, making very good time until the river divided into two looping arcs going in opposite directions. Here the counselor had made them turn at marker buoy 49, and Dinty Scollino had yelled out.

"Hey, 49! That's my grandmother's apartment!"

And for the next ten minutes the boys had chanted:

Number 49, Number 49,  
Scollino's old granny  
Is in Number 49!

However, the chant petered out when the current strengthened. It took all their concentration to deal with the fast water.

"Exhilarating, what?" Bertie Ludd-Dinsmore had offered after almost an hour of steady, rapid current. Bertie was from England, a first time camper, but an excellent canoeist.

"Right-o!"

"Pip, pip!"

"Spot on, old chap!"

Bertie could never say anything without inadvertently soliciting a chorus of what all the boys thought were British expressions.

Then the counselor had cut through the catcalls: "Race time! There's another lake just ahead. Turn west at marker 36. There's sand beach dead ahead from that. We'll eat there. Last crew in builds the fire and washes the dishes—go!"

A morning of paddling in strong current had left the boys with plenty of reserve, so that they were well out into the lake when the wind gusts came. The second canoe swamped completely, but they were close to shore and everybody walked in, pulling the equipment after them. The first came in almost without incident, as did the third. The counselor was in that one. The fourth canoe overturned well out, at the marker buoy. Only Steve Calumet and Dinty Scollino knew how close a call that had been. They had gone out with the counselor to bring number four and its crew to shore, and lost the extra paddles, the charts and compass, and two sleeping bags in the struggle.

No one noticed just when the counselor lost consciousness—if indeed he had. He'd carried the fourth canoe the last few steps to shore, and then sat with the boys as they watched the spinning



wind devils stirring along the surface until they disappeared on the other side. Then, when they had all caught their breath, the boys were so busy talking out their big scare that no one paid any attention until Arnie Majeski said, "Look, you guys! What's the matter with Hank?"

The counselor lay quietly beside the canoe he had carried in. His face was calm; his arms were folded across his chest.

"He's getting his beauty sleep!" snorted "Mule" Kovacs in the bray that gave him his name. "Too old to cut it any more!"

"Is he okay?" Jimmy Pitt, the youngest camper, stepped a little closer.

"Naw, it's a gag." Arnie Majeski was no longer concerned.

Dinty Scollino looked at Steve. "This is the big test, I'll bet. He goes to sleep and we have to find the last turn."

Steve shrugged. He felt very uncomfortable.

"He's really okay, isn't he, Steve?" Jimmy had gotten even closer to Hank.

Steve shrugged again.

"Well, he can sleep!" Mule Kovacs announced. "We came here to eat!"

Mule had struck about the only chord that could guarantee agreement and for the next half-hour the boys fell to. Through it all, Hank the counselor did not move. Not until Bertie Ludd-Dinsmore gave voice to the obvious did the boys acknowledge that their counselor's condition might be for real.

"I say, do you not think his color is just a bit off?"

The fact that not a single imitation of his accent rose to mock him showed they all knew they were in trouble. Panic was not far away.

"We gotta take him in!"

"You mean carry him?"

"Where do we go?"

"Yeah! Where are we?"

"I say we stay here!"

"What if the storm comes back?"

"Let's wait until . . ."

"Steve!" Dinty Scollino tried to yell over the noise.

"STEVE!" Nobody was louder than Mule Kovacs. "Everybody shut up!"

In the silence which followed, Jimmy Pitt placed the leadership in Steve Calumet's hands.

"What do we do, Steve?"

Steve had been trying to take Hank's pulse, without really knowing what he was looking for.

"I don't know for sure," he said quietly. "But we've got to take him back. He's sick and I don't think we should wait for them to come looking for us."

"So where do we go?" asked Arnie Majeski. "Where's the fourth turn? I've never been way out here before. Has anybody?"

Arnie triggered the shouting again and it took Steve a minute, with Mule's help, to regain their attention.

"I think I've got it. Now listen. We stay in this direction until we find marker 18. If I'm right, we go home from there. Let's not waste time. Into the canoes!"

*Why does Steve want to find marker buoy 18? And when they do find it, will they turn to the left or to the right to get back to camp?*

---

See page 148 for the solution to the April puzzle.

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*(continued from page 3)*

stands for Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, the convention's sponsor.

This year's Guest of Honor will be Edward D. Hoch. Visual Media Guest of Honor will be William Link, and Fan Guest of Honor will be Bruce E. Pelz. A Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented to William Campbell Gault. Toastmaster is Bill Crider.

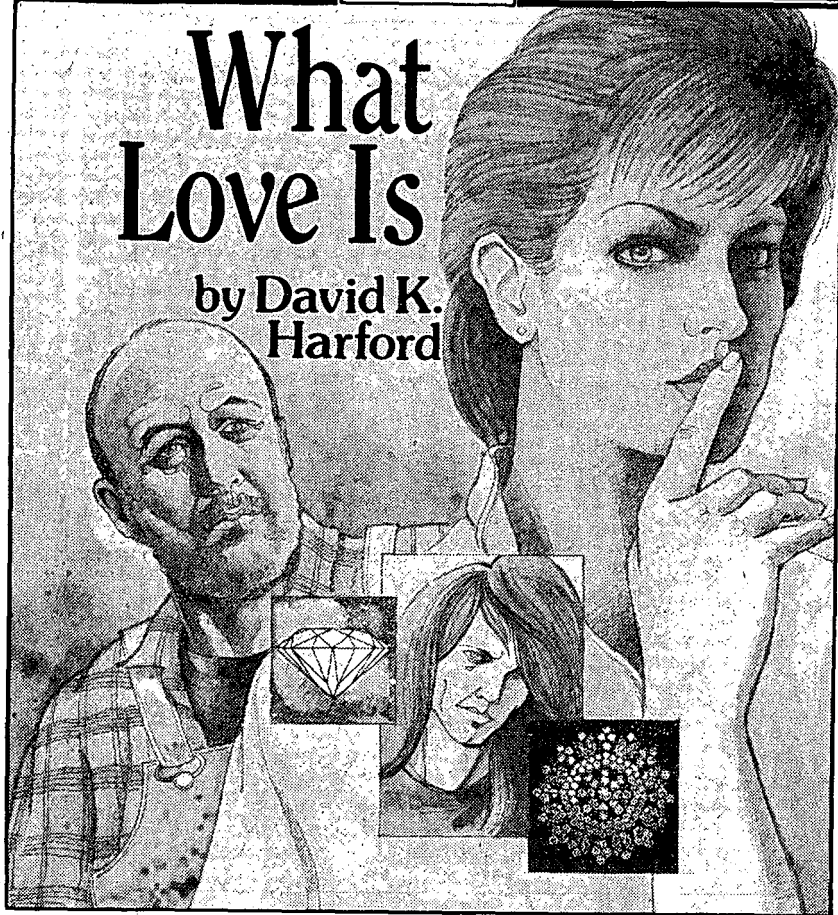
A note on another subject . . . Some of you have written us to say that you like to know

the original publication date of our Mystery Classic each time. That information is usually contained in the copyright line that accompanies the story, but "The Italian's Story" by Catherine Crowe is in the public domain, and no copyright line accompanies it. We can tell you, however, that Mrs. Crowe (1800?-76) included it in her book *Ghosts and Family Legends*, published in 1848. Our source for the story says it is "founded, as far as possible, upon authentic evidence."

Hmmm!

# What Love Is

by David K. Harford



**F**rom across the store Rose Hanson watched Mr. Feeber flailing his skinny arms, whispering with quick gestures to Captain Kraft.

Although she could only grab bits and pieces of the conversation, she could guess what Feeber was anxious to get across to the police officer.

She'd heard similar explanations in Cincinnati and Norfolk.

Equally familiar to her was the way the police officer listened—intently, nodding occasionally; wrinkling his forehead a bit, not in doubt, but as a preface to a question; jotting down notes.

*Illustration by George Thompson*

"... appraised it myself," came Feeber's bits and pieces. "Of course, I'll refund all of Mrs. Witkin's money. . . . Can't understand it. . . ." His voice lowered. "You sure they're phony. . . ?" Feeber frowned at the worthless diamond bracelet dangling in his fingers.

Simultaneously Mr. Feeber and Captain Kraft glanced across the store at her. Staring back directly at Kraft, matching him eyeball to eyeball, the store clerk thought that his steady, penetrating gaze was similar to the looks she'd got in Omaha and Topeka and Detroit.

She'd made an unscientific study of how cops expressed their suspicions: Some gazed, trying to be casual, hiding what they were thinking as Captain Kraft was doing right now; others flicked an eyebrow; some came right over to her; still others tried the intimidation approach with piercing looks and questions meant to scare the hell out of her; many never suspected her at all.

Captain Kraft was a gazer, she decided, and a thinker, one not easily fooled. She'd play him for that, and having summed up the enemy, Rose Hanson went about cleaning the glass display cases that held much of Feeber Jewelry Store's glittering inventory.

\* \* \*

Later that evening, back in her apartment along the lake shore, Rose scowled at the dirty water standing in the kitchen sink. She felt a migraine coming on. What could Mr. Crumbuckle have been fixing this time that he'd need to fill the sink? She winced at the standing water and at the thought of the elderly, overly-kind handyman; then, using a small pot and a bucket, she began to bail out the sink.

From where she stood dipping the pot in and out of the sink she could see the unmarked police car outside with—yes—it sure looked like Captain Kraft himself. In Atlanta, for instance, the investigating officer sent underlings to do the tailing. But this Captain Kraft was showing all the markings of a determined, seasoned pro; he'd take care of this himself. She enjoyed the industrious cops. They were such interesting sport.

Carrying the bucket of water out into the hall to dump down Mr. Crumbuckle's utility sink, she remembered Sacramento and how difficult it had been there to find a reliable fence for the diamonds. *No, no. It had been rubies in Sacramento.* She'd found a fence here in Erie easily enough, but could she trust a man like Prance? Such a degenerate?

Prance. She shuddered, re-

membering the sleazeball. His name conjured images of a young frisky colt, untrained, or more aptly, and worse, some smaller animal like a weasel, darting in and out of the shadowy area that lay between the law and lawlessness. In this respect she pegged Prance as possibly being what she called "criminally bi." He'd sell the stolen gems, no doubt, and use the money to buy what drugs were available, or to buy what women would have him, but if he were ever picked up on an unrelated charge, he'd swing over to the police's side, singing to them about Rose and her diamonds as if hoping to convince the police he had been on their side all along.

Yes, no doubt, finding a reliable fence, someone who'd pay her top buck for the stolen jewels (in this case the diamonds she'd removed from the bracelet and replaced with costume jewelry while Mr. Feeber took his lunch breaks) had become the weakest, and most risky link in her chain of operations. Worse, it seemed with every job every fence just got sleazier.

She had always thought it would be through her fence that she'd get caught, caught by someone who'd sing to the police to save his own skin. There was no kindness in this dark corner of her world, no room to be considerate.

To add to her uncertainty about Prance, Captain Kraft was on her case *right now*, not giving her any room to operate. With a little more time she could perhaps have found someone more trustworthy than Prance. And she knew Kraft was the breed of cop who would continue to stay all over her worse than a hound on a hare.

Oh, the migraine—coming around from the back of her head and rounding the corner above her ears, pinching every nerve ending in her skull. Tomorrow she'd meet Prance to find what his buyer was willing to pay for the ice. The transaction could not go down soon enough to suit her. Suddenly and inexplicably she wanted out of Erie as soon as she dumped the stuff. No hanging around shopping and sightseeing, as she did in Boston.

Maybe it was time for her to get out of the business altogether.

She was dumping her kitchen sink water into Mr. Crumbuckle's utility sink when she spied the heavysset handyman carrying a plunger down the hall towards her. Her migraine roared around to her forehead like a lumbering train pulling a heavy load, thundering straight through her brain.

"Here, here, let me help you with that." Mr. Crumbuckle

quicken his pace when he saw her. He held the plunger up high in the same gallant fashion a knight brandishes his sword. "I was just on my way into your place to unclog your sink for you, Miss Hanson. Didn't know you was home."

*Yeah. Right.* Before she could resist, he took the bucket from her and poured the rest of the water out. Although his face was covered with stubbles of white hair, she caught the heavy aroma of his freshly applied aftershave filling the utility closet. She knew then he had purposely waited until she got home before charging out of his apartment, plunger in hand. The clogged sink would be an "emergency," she was sure.

"I've taken care of the sink, Mr. Crumbuckle. Thank you anyway."

"Oh, no. No, please, Miss Hanson. It's an emergency. Remember what you said about emergencies? It's my job. If I don't take care of these apartments, Mr. Cabree'll get someone else and I'll be out in the street. You wouldn't want to see old Mr. Crumbuckle out on the street begging, would you?"

"I won't mention it to Mr. Cabree," she said. But she was sure it would not end here. She did not want kind Mr. Crumbuckle in her apartment fixing the kitchen sink, or fixing anything else for that matter. Not

tonight. In a few days it wouldn't matter. The migraine train sounded a shrill blast of its whistle reverberating inside her head right above both brows, and she squinted hard and rubbed her forehead to relieve the pain. "I fixed the sink. It drains okay."

"You run a snake down it and tighten the pipes back up? Tight? They can leak," Crumbuckle said skeptically.

"The sink's okay. I used a coat hanger," she lied.

"You feeling all right, Miss Hanson?" Crumbuckle placed a large hand on the back of her neck. "Got a headache? Maybe you want me to give you a neck massage." His strong hands began gently massaging the base of her skull. "I can make you feel better," he said. "Please, Miss Hanson, let old Mr. Crumbuckle make that headache go away. My wife used to say I got good hands for rubbing."

Squirming away from him and stepping out from where he was nearly smothering her in the utility closet, she said, "I'm sure you have good hands, but I don't need a massage. I'm all right. I just need to lie down. And as for the sink, well, I'm home now and you know what you and I agreed on. You're not to come into my place while I'm home."

"But this could be an emer-



"It's not an emergency, Mr. Crumbuckle," she said gently but forcibly. "I fixed it and tightened the pipes tight."

Mr. Crumbuckle, who traded rent on his apartment across from Rose for his handyman work around the apartment complex, was really nothing more than a harmless, lonely old man. Rose Hanson knew that. But what a bother he could be sometimes.

He was sixty-five, twenty-five years her senior. (He'd told her his life history during the many longwinded tangents he'd often gotten off on: retired from GE; wife dead for fifteen years. God, how he loved her. Know what love is, Miss Hanson? Drew Social Security and his retirement. Two kids across the country in California who didn't care about him. San Diego. Ever been to San Diego, Miss Hanson? She nodded, smiling to herself, that she had. (San Diego was the emerald city.)

But because she was the only single girl in the complex and the only girl under fifty and without a doubt the best looking girl (or so Mr. Crumbuckle had said), from the day she moved in six months before, he had taken it upon himself to be her personal champion, showering her with overly generous portions of kindness and consideration.

It had started out slowly,

harmlessly, like her headache. He helped her unpack; arranged the furniture that came with the apartment so that it suited her just right; hung plants, curtains. Then, as the weeks passed and she saw him nearly every day, he began to feel free to touch her, casually, as he spoke of how lonely it was to grow old, touching just her shoulder, or her chin or cheek. It was nothing more than a grandfatherly touch, she was sure, but still it irritated her. She hated to be touched by the wrong person for the wrong reasons.

Oh, Mr. Crumbuckle was harmless all right, and she genuinely liked him. He was really very sweet. It was just that he was a little *too* sweet and *too* kind. Oh, so bothersome.

After she'd gotten the job at Feeber's store, she would come home from work and find obvious evidence of Crumbuckle's having been there—fixing the plumbing, or the electrical wiring, painting, leafing through her magazines. He began to leave his coveralls draped across her kitchen chair, and she began to wonder if anyone else was getting any work done in their apartments.

Then he began leaving things for her like boxes of candy, homemade cookies (I love to bake, Miss Hanson. These are filled with all sorts of goodies.),



and flowers and little notes signed, *Love, GC*. I like baking you things and buying you things, he told her. If you ever need money, Miss Hanson . . .

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Crumbuckle," she told him. "But it's really not necessary."

Finally she had to put her foot down and let him know he'd crossed the line when he began walking in on her not five minutes after she'd get home, letting himself in with his passkey, assuming she expected him to be there with her. Sometimes it was to explain what he'd done to her place that day, sometimes he said he left a tool. Sometimes he brought her more flowers he'd picked out front. More baked goods and candy. Little knickknacks to be placed throughout her apartment. For a while it seemed every time she turned around, there'd be Mr. Crumbuckle offering her this or that, explaining what he'd done for her that day or just standing there watching her.

"You know what love is, Miss Hanson?" he asked her again early one Sunday morning. She stood in the doorway of her bedroom in her thin nightie while his eyes traveled slowly up and down her when he handed her the Erie Sunday *Times* that he'd bought her.

She didn't answer. She didn't know what love was, nor did

she care. It had never been important to her. She knew, however, that love was not a bother. So that Sunday afternoon she sat him down and told him as nicely as she could about her *right* to personal space and her *right* to privacy and that he was not, repeat *not*, for any reason, other than emergencies, to come into her apartment when she was there or she'd have to mention it to Mr. Cabree. You can smother a person with kindness, you know, she told him.

"I understand, sure. Hey, you got rights. If all those criminals out there got rights, you got rights." Mr. Crumbuckle was also staunchly opposed to lawlessness of any kind, something that privately made her chuckle. And he'd picked that Sunday morning to take off on one of his longwinded tangents about law and order, and how there is none today and how the criminals are taking over, how in the rat race the rats are winning, and that it isn't safe to walk the streets of Erie any more. It's the system that's failed, he told her. They're too easy on them. (She agreed with this, but for different reasons.) Just too much crime out there. "Yes, sir, ought to line them all up against a wall and shoot them, and that's why I come in, Miss Hanson, to keep an eye on you. You never can tell. But I understand what you're telling

me, Miss Hanson," he said, finally returning to her original point about his coming into her apartment. "I understand. You got rights."

"I understand." Mr. Crumbuckle let the plunger drop to the floor of the utility closet. He held her empty bucket in his other hand. "It's just I haven't seen you in a few days. I guess you ain't got much time for an old man like me."

"And you're a kind, sweet man," she said truthfully, but glad to be getting back inside her apartment. "I'll be going to see my folks in a day or so. You can check the kitchen sink then, while I'm gone. I'll even make us a nice lunch when I get back to repay you for all the nice things you've done for me. How's that?"

The old man's face brightened with the glitter of something to look forward to. He picked up the plunger and twirled it.

Rose Hanson closed the door, leaning against it. It had been too close for comfort. She sighed heavily, thankful to be alone, thankful Mr. Crumbuckle would not be bothering her by working on the sink.

She was not going to visit her folks; her folks were dead. And when she finished her business with that weasel Prance, she was not coming back, not ever

She peeped out the window to where Captain Kraft was still parked. By now, the dull ache of her migraine was pouring down through her entire body. Rubbing her temples, she picked up the phone to call Prance.

**"I**f you don't get your hand off my leg, I'll kill you where you sit."

Her hand was in her purse. There was nothing in the purse, nothing she could use to make good her threat, but Prance didn't know that. She felt his hand depart from where he'd slid it between her knees. "That's better," she said as the weasel placed both hands on the top of the table where they belonged.

They were sitting at a table for two in the middle of the afternoon in a dimly lit bar on Erie's busy Peach Street.

Prance ran the back of his hand across his runny nose, sniffing again, and sat back in his chair inspecting her.

Without a doubt he was the most disgusting degenerate she had ever worked with. His long, greasy hair hanging to his shoulders gave the impression he'd just stepped out of a hard rain. His face was pocked (and his arms beneath his long-sleeved shirt were scarred, too, she imagined). He was unshaven and his teeth were

crooked and yellowed. His tapered, pointed snout was what made her think of him as a weasel.

"You're quite the lady," he wheezed, short of breath, "quite the dish."

"How much, Prance?" She didn't have time for his attempts at flattery. Using the old trick of entering the Millcreek Mall through one door, then immediately leaving through another, had caught Captain Kraft off guard. But he'd be looking for her, quite probably waiting for her at her apartment complex, and so, being kind of on the run, she was anxious to complete her business with Prance. Sitting across from the scruffy weasel just made her all the more anxious to leave.

Prance pulled a small wad of paper from his pocket and laid it on the table. Unfolding it, he carelessly revealed the medium-sized diamond she'd given him so his buyer could appraise it and fix his price. The other forty diamonds she had stashed away in her apartment, hidden, until they reached an agreement. "Yes, sir," Prance continued in a steady, even voice, "you're some kind of goodlooking filly. How'd you ever get in this business?" He sniffled again, showing no signs of wanting to hurry things up. Instead, he stood on wobbly legs

and tried to straighten out his wrinkled clothes. "Got to use the men's room," he told her. "Yeh, man." He pointed a dirty, bony finger at her. "I've been thinking a lot about you. You're all right."

She watched his lanky form swagger towards the *Men's* sign. He couldn't have been more than twenty-five, thirty tops, about the same age as most of the other dinner and bar customers eating and drinking in the Plymouth Restaurant. But Prance stood out like a rotted tomato lying atop a bushel of shiny ripe ones. While almost everyone else in the restaurant was neatly dressed in shorts, slacks, and tank tops or muscle shirts (many of the guys and girls, she assumed, had been out sailing or swimming all day in Lake Erie), Prance looked like something that had been wadded up and tossed away wet.

A young, rather goodlooking man in a green muscle shirt kept looking over at her sitting alone. He winked and she averted her eyes, not wanting to send any kind of signal that she might be available. But his flirting with her reminded her of what she had sacrificed for her lifestyle. She had to move around from city to city too much, sometimes too quickly, so she couldn't afford to possess a lot of things like furniture

and deeds to property, items almost everyone else took for granted. Nor could she afford to be possessed by things, things like love or romance or even a little harmless flirting.

The man in the green shirt turned back to the bar and talked to the young blonde female bartender.

While Prance was gone, two thoughts came to mind: How *did* she get in this business? And she also thought again about how certain aspects of her operation had changed over the years—most notably how fences like Prance had degenerated during her lifetime as a jewel thief.

Yes, Prance was a shining (or rather dull) example of this, and she blamed the deterioration on two things: a permissive, lenient justice system and drugs. Captain Kraft might be interested in her theories, she mused to herself, amused also by the irony of this thought. But then he'd probably seen it all already. Would he be interested in knowing that although drugs might be eating away at the wholesome fibers of society, they were also eating away at the not-so-wholesome segment?

To put it frankly, it was becoming nearly impossible for her to find a fence she trusted. Nowadays, most would sell their mothers for want of an all-day high, so they'd most certainly

sell out a compatriot. It didn't used to be that way. There used to be honor among thieves.

And they'd become oh so careless. Ten years ago her fence would never have picked a place as open as the restaurant she was now in; he'd have never carelessly thrown the gem out on to the table so everyone could see it. She attributed Prance's rashness to the lenient justice system. Quite plainly, it no longer served as a deterrent. Prance simply didn't care. He knew, if caught, all he'd have to do was cooperate with the police and he'd walk. Probation, maybe. And knowing that, and (as Mr. Crumbuckle observed) knowing he had rights, too, Prance tended towards carelessness. Yes, sir, drugs muddling good judgment and character, the justice system playing patty cake with the likes of Prance, sure had their deteriorating effect on this aspect of her criminal world. It was time to get out. After how many years?

She had been born with a jeweler's loupe in one eye. Her parents owned a jewelry store in Madison, Wisconsin, and from growing up around the store she picked up the necessary knowledge and skills needed to become a certified jeweler. But after her parents were killed in a fire that also gutted the store, and after squaring up with the

insurance companies, she discovered she had no desire to settle into any one lifetime occupation, where routines easily turned to ruts and her life was measured out for her by someone else's timeclock. She had no desire for that. Nor did she have time for a husband and a family. No time for love, so she had no firsthand knowledge of what love and romance were. She glanced over at Green Muscle Shirt.

What she had was a jeweler's knowledge and skill, and a bent towards rebelling against authority. Those were the foundation blocks on which her life was built.

She made one local heist in Madison. (To this day she doubted if the owner of that set of earrings was even aware her stones were worth fifteen cents.) She took a job as a clerk in one of Madison's better stores. The owner, Mr. Lake, owed her father money, and when her father died, Lake had somehow squirmed out of paying it. Rose simply collected what was her due. She also took several sheets of Lake's business stationery.

The rest she built up from there, slowly and carefully. Detroit next, a necklace; Boston, a lovely brooch; Pittsburgh; then on to the West Coast, Sacramento, San Diego, L.A. At each city she'd write herself a letter of reference on someone's stationery,

stating that their store had burned down, that they were out of business, and that they recommended the bearer of this letter as a knowledgeable, reliable salesclerk.

For a store clerk's job, it was usually enough to get her hired somewhere. Never would she let on she knew more about the business than just the ability to stand there looking attractive, being polite to customers, and keeping busy. Work a store for several months, find an opportunity to make a switch, then split. Most stores never even knew they'd been hit. Then find a fence.

She saw Prance heading back in her direction, staggering slightly and buttoning his sleeve.

No. It was time to get out of the business. Wash her hands of the degenerates. Retire. Move to Florida and buy a bungalow before some inconsiderate, careless sleaze like Prance brought her down. Suddenly she was struck with an odd idea. Why not, after the sale here, collect all the money she had squirreled away across the country, buy a bungalow in Florida, and hire someone like Mr. Crumbuckle to take care of things—the lawn, maintenance, clogged sinks? Why not Mr. Crumbuckle himself?

She laughed to herself. It was an interesting thought. There'd

have to be rules, of course, lines drawn. And, of course, she could never let Mr. Crumbuckle know about the darker side of her former life. He would never approve of that, she was sure. Ah, but the simple beauty of it. She could lie back, retired, and let Mr. Crumbuckle smother her in kindness. No talk of love. That was the ticket—smothered in kindness. No more fears of getting caught, no more mi-graines.

As she watched Prance slither across the room towards her, the thought of retiring (with Mr. Crumbuckle puttering around the house taking care of things) stretched out before her, like the fresh blue waters of Lake Erie, tranquil and alluring. Yes, definitely. This was her last job.

**A**fter a fair amount of heated haggling, they agreed on two hundred twenty-five dollars a stone, delivered the next day. On her way back to her apartment she stopped to eat at an Italian place, Hector's on Liberty Street, and at the Erie airport she checked flights to Florida. She could catch a hop to Pittsburgh and from there a nonstop flight would whisk her into Miami.

All that was left was to retrieve the diamonds, deliver them to Prance, and collect her

money. Sometime tomorrow she'd have Mr. Crumbuckle in and present him with her idea of the two of them moving to Florida. There was no doubt in her mind what Mr. Crumbuckle's answer would be. As strongly opposed to crime as Mr. Crumbuckle was, he might even serve as a good deterrent for her in the event she weakened or became bored with the easy life. She could see the expression on his . . .

She stiffened in the back seat of the taxi as it pulled up next to her apartment complex. In the gray, dim light of approaching darkness she spied Captain Kraft's car parked along the curb directly in front of the building. Worse, a uniformed police officer stood blocking the front door.

Her first instincts were to run, to tell the cabbie to keep going. But she couldn't be sure the police were there for her. She'd allowed Prance to keep the single diamond, their deal being for forty-one gems, at more than nine thousand dollars. Maybe it was something totally unrelated that brought the police there. There were at least fifty families living in the complex. Maybe some kind of violent domestic dispute. Maybe. But as she paid the cabbie his fare, she doubted it.

Without explanation an officer quickly escorted her up-

stairs. A cold, damp chill seemed to have swept in off the lake and permeated the painted cement walls along the hall. She could see her apartment door wide open, and she pulled her thin blouse up around her neck for warmth that wasn't there. The chill slicing through her cut bone deep.

Kraft greeted her inside. That wasn't all that greeted her. There were four other men that she could see. Two were searching through the living room, turning over couch cushions, pulling out bureau drawers and dumping their contents. Kraft grabbed her small purse the minute she stepped inside and emptied out its contents, pawing through them. She could also see someone moving around in her bedroom, searching, and she heard the sound of metal hitting against metal coming from the bathroom. The place was already in shambles.

She was in shambles, but she quickly collected her thoughts as best she could. *Prance must have been picked up, and he sang. After all, if she could find Prance so easily, the police would know who he was, too.* This was her worst-case scenario. Without being obvious about it, she looked into the kitchen to see if that room had been searched. She was relieved to see that it had been. The cupboards were open, all

the canned food, pots and pans, and utensils were pulled from where they had been stored and were now on the floor and the kitchen table. A wave of relief poured through her, and quickly she averted her attention from the kitchen, particularly from the kitchen sink. *Let them search the rest of the place.*

The best defense was a strong offense. That would be her strategy. "What's the meaning of this, Captain . . ."

"Sit down, Miss Hanson," Kraft said, pulling folded paper from his breast pocket. The butt of the service pistol on his waist appeared under his jacket. He handed her the papers.

She stood skimming what she knew was a search warrant.

"I said, sit down," Kraft growled, glaring at her.

She sat.

He began by reading her her rights.

She waved them off. She knew it was only a formality, and she knew what her rights were. He read them all anyway.

A uniformed policeman suddenly stuck his head out the doorway. "Hamot Hospital just called, sir," the officer said.

Kraft jerked his head around expectantly. "And?"

"He died, sir," the officer said. "Couldn't save him."

Kraft swore violently, and kicked the couch a good lick. He turned his attention back to



Rose. "You're a lucky woman, Miss Hanson," he said flatly. "Extremely lucky."

She didn't understand it, but she sensed something had just gone wrong. This left a very tiny sliver of a crack through which there might be an escape. Maybe. Kraft's swearing told her something had upset him. Or was it a ruse? They weren't packing up to leave, though. They were still searching. She kept on the offense but remained seated, making very, very sure she didn't look towards the kitchen sink. Were they done searching the kitchen? She hoped so. *He died, sir. Couldn't save him.* Who died? She had to keep Kraft off balance. "What the hell is this?" she demanded, waving the warrant at Kraft.

Kraft moved towards her. "That's a search warrant, Miss Hanson."

"I can see that."

"And we're searching for Mr. Feeber's diamonds."

"I didn't take anything. You have no proof. You have to have probable cause for this. What have you got for probable cause? What have you got?" She flipped the warrant at his face.

Kraft put his hands on his hips, pulling his sports jacket back, and studied her. One of the officers searching the living room began pulling things from the hall closet.

Kraft spoke. "What have we got? I've got several things. I've got a real nasty feeling about you, Miss Hanson. I've got probable cause because I've got a Republican judge up for reelection this year. He needs votes. Seems he's pulled a few boners, let some people off that the public thought should have been up against the wall. I've got Mr. Feeber, chairman of the EIVA." He paused, watching her, watching in what direction her eyes went when she wasn't looking at him. "EIVA. Erie Independent Voters' Association." He pronounced each word carefully. "Voters' Association. Voters. Votes. Get it, Miss Hanson?"

She got it. She also figured his probable cause had to be slim to stoop to politics. *Who died? Don't sit here submissively. Go after him. Nothing to lose. It had to be Prance who died. He shot it out with the police?* Somehow that didn't seem likely. *Up against the wall?* That sent something worming in her guts. One of Mr. Crumbuckle's pet expressions. Had he come in to check the sink, discovered the diamonds, and called the police? *Was Mr. Crumbuckle dead?* But they hadn't bothered with the drain trap in the kitchen sink. The diamonds, secured and wrapped in a piece of her nylons, were stuffed in the sink drain pipe . . . You know a man named

John Saddle?" Kraft asked.

"No. I don't know anyone named John Saddle," she said truthfully.

"Young kid, dark greasy hair, pimples. Face looks like a cold pizza the dog drug in. Maybe you know him as Prance. You don't know him? Never met him?" He shoved a fuzzy photo of Prance at her.

"No," she said immediately, but she pretended to study the snapshot so her actions would appear convincing.

"Oh, Miss Hanson, now don't you lie to me," Kraft said. He lifted his head and called towards the bedroom. "Bob?"

The officer searching her bedroom stuck his head out the door. "Sir?"

Her heart went slack and her escape route closed. The officer, a rather goodlooking man, was dressed in a green muscle shirt.

"Bob, you were assigned to tail John Saddle." Kraft turned to Rose. "Prance to you, maybe." Back to the green muscle shirt. "Do you see anyone in this room Prance met with recently?"

Green Muscle Shirt nodded. "Miss Hanson there." He pulled a small notebook from his back pocket and began to read. "On eighteen August, 1990, that's today, at about two thirty P.M. at the Plymouth Restaurant on Peach Street, I observed John Saddle sitting with a woman I now identify as Rose Hanson.

They talked for some time. At one point he went to the john, came back. They appeared to be arguing some." Green Muscle Shirt raised his head, no longer reading from the notebook. He looked straight at Rose. "As if arguing over prices, sir. For corroboration, there's the owner of the establishment and the waitress who waited on the couple." He flipped the book shut.

Kraft flicked an eyebrow at her. "Still don't know him?"

*Got to take a chance it's Prance who died.* "I want to talk to this man, this John Saddle, myself," she said. "Maybe if I saw him ..." It was the only thing she could think to say.

"Unfortunately, that's not possible." Kraft buttoned his coat one button. "Mr. Saddle, whom we know as Prance, sometime drug dealer, sometime fence for an assortment of stolen items, full-time scum, collapsed in the back of a police car when we were taking him in for questioning. He died just a while ago. I'm sure the autopsy will show Mr. Saddle died of a cocaine induced heart attack. The excitement and the chase were just too much for him, I guess. Shall we have a moment of silence, Miss Hanson?" There *was* a moment of silence before Kraft continued. "Not out of respect, mind you. Scums like Prance don't deserve respect. The bands should

play. But let's have a moment of silence so you can refresh your memory, Miss Hanson."

The crack she'd seen open, then close immediately with the appearance of Green Muscle Shirt, suddenly opened again with Prance's being dead. They hadn't had time to question Prance. "Oh, *that* man?" Her thoughts began to turn to words as quickly as they came to mind. "Bad photo. Yes, I remember now."

"Thought you might." Kraft's voice dripped with sarcasm.

"I never knew him, though. Never knew his name. He came over to me. We talked for a while, but then he tried to pick me up. I told him to push off. He left, then came back. I kept trying to get rid of..."

She hadn't been looking directly at Kraft. Instead she was staring at the floor, pretending to be struggling to remember an insignificant incident during a long day. When she looked up, Kraft was unfolding a piece of paper. From it he held up the diamond Prance must still have had on him.

"Mr. Feeber's diamond," Kraft said, laying the jewel in his palm and pushing it right under her nose so she could clearly see it.

More thoughts coming out as quickly as she could verbalize them. "Yes, well, that's what I was about to tell you. This Sad-

dle or Prance, whatever his name was, he came into Mr. Feeber's store a while back. Twice, I think. Looked at a few pieces, then left. That's why he came over to my table. He recognized me from the store. What do you know about that? He stole Mr. Feeber's diamonds?" Weak Probable Cause versus equally weak Reasonable Doubt.

Kraft roared with fake laughter. "And switched gems and brought a phony necklace back? Is that what you're trying to tell me, Miss Hanson; that John Saddle came into Feeber's store, somehow lifted the necklace from a closed case, took it home, switched real diamonds for fake ones, and then somehow brought the necklace back? Is that your story, Miss Hanson?"

She squirmed in the chair. "Well, all I know is..."

"No, Miss Hanson. No." He leaned towards her so that his face was so close to hers she could see little nicks in his skin where he had cut himself shaving. "No. You stole the diamonds." Everyone else in the room stopped searching to listen to Kraft seal off her final escape routes. "I submit that you somehow switched the diamonds in the bracelet, sought out Saddle, and were in the process of arranging a sale when Officer Beech here was watching you. Further, since Officer

Beech observed no such sale between you two, I'm assuming you still have the other diamonds. You have them here in this apartment. I'd bet my career on it . . ."

A police officer wearing coveralls came out of the bathroom.

" . . . and what this gem here is," Kraft was saying, holding up the single diamond so all could see it, "is the probable cause you asked about earlier. Weak, I'll admit, but such is politics . . ."

Horror of horrors. She felt herself stiffen. She wasn't listening to Kraft. All Kraft had were theories and suspicions. What the policeman in the coveralls had was worse. He was carrying two pipe wrenches, wrenches to loosen drain pipes.

"Nothing in the bathroom sink," the officer said to Kraft.

Reflexively her eyes darted to the kitchen sink . . .

Kraft hissed loudly, sounding like a big balloon letting all the air out of himself, relieved. He'd been watching her face, watching and waiting, and his patience had paid off. "They're in the kitchen sink," he said so matter-of-factly one would have guessed he'd put the diamonds in the drain trap himself.

She slumped down in the chair with nowhere else to go. Her every escape route, her fate, had just been sealed tight.

"Miss Hanson?"

The familiar voice was soft with a slight twist of concern in it. She turned to see Mr. Crumbuckle staring at her in a queer sort of way. His eyes settling on her were moist, like two deep, hazel-colored pools of water that reflected his confusion and his disapproval.

"You in some kind of trouble, Miss Hanson?" he asked softly as he stood in the doorway until Captain Kraft motioned that he could come in. Crumbuckle entered, shaking his shaggy gray hair as if trying to shake off what he didn't understand.

"Mr. Crumbuckle here let us into your place," Kraft said.

She wasn't paying much attention to Mr. Crumbuckle or to Captain Kraft. She was tuned into what was going on out in the kitchen. Any moment she expected to hear it. The officer was on his back under the sink unscrewing the sink trap. Any moment now she expected: *Here they are, captain. I found them.*

"Miss Hanson? Here's your bucket back." Mr. Crumbuckle tried to hand her her empty bucket, still studying her face as if seeing her for the first time, as if she was someone he wasn't sure he recognized. "When you gave it to me last night, I knew there was too much water in it. Understand, Miss Hanson? There was too much water in it."

Kraft strolled into the kitchen to check progress.

She didn't understand what Mr. Crumbuckle was talking about, but there was something in his voice she'd never heard before, caution and sadness. Her eyes met his. Yes, his eyes were moist. Hers were dry and, she imagined, flushed a pale red, the color of fear and defeat. Suddenly she began envisioning life behind bars where a goodlooking woman like her would be . . .

"So I knew that leak in the bathroom sink was worse than you let me know. Understand? It was an emergency, Miss Hanson." He set the bucket at her feet. "But old Mr. Crumbuckle took care of it. There was just too much water in the bucket. Shouldn't have been any water in the bucket."

She stood up slowly, hopefully. What was he trying to tell her? *Too much water in the bucket?* Yes, of course. She suddenly understood the riddle. What Mr. Crumbuckle was trying to say was that if she had unclogged the sink and run a coat hanger down the drain like she said she had, the sink would have been cleared. There'd have been no need to empty water into his utility sink. Mr. Crumbuckle knew that. He'd come in to fix the drain . . .

"I hope you don't mind I come in your place today to fix that

problem. It's okay. I took care of your problem."

. . . and found the diamonds.

"Nothing in here, captain," the police officer slid out from under the sink. "These pipes are clear."

She heard the policeman speak, but his voice seemed distant. She heard Mr. Crumbuckle distantly. She heard Captain Kraft say, "Whaaat?" as he rattled the pipes, checking for himself. In fact, her mind hummed with a mumble of distant sounds and words. She felt herself melt like an ice cube on a hot sidewalk. She could not take her eyes off Mr. Crumbuckle. "That was very, very kind of you, Mr. Crumbuckle," she whispered softly, honestly, straight from the heart.

"Keep searching," Captain Kraft told his men. He came back over to where she and Mr. Crumbuckle stood near the doorway.

"I baked you some cookies, too, Miss Hanson." Mr. Crumbuckle produced a large box, opened the lid, and revealed a top layer of about eight cookies shaped like small dollops of ice cream with Hershey Kisses on top. "Take these home to your folks," Mr. Crumbuckle told her. "Try one now. They're filled with all sorts of goodies."

Like moving through a dream, she took one of the top cookies

and bit into it, her hands trembling slightly.

"Cookie, captain?" Mr. Crumbuckle offered Kraft the opened box. "I kind of look after Miss Hanson."

Kraft refused a cookie.

"Well, here, give your men some. There's plenty." Crumbuckle scooped up the remaining seven cookies from the top layer and put them on the stand near the doorway. That left four layers of cookies in the box, each layer separated by a sheet of waxed paper. "There's plenty. I baked four dozen, Miss Hanson." Mr. Crumbuckle closed the box up. "Even if we give the officers here some, you'll still have forty left to take home with you. Understand, Miss Hanson?"

Still numbed, she looked down at the little mound-shaped cookies on the stand. Forty of them in the box—filled with goodies. She understood.

Mr. Crumbuckle surveyed her apartment. "Since your place is such a mess, I'll keep these over at my place until you're ready to go."

"Pull that carpet up," Kraft instructed his men.

"I sure hope you get this straightened out okay, Miss

Hanson," Mr. Crumbuckle told her. "Probably be leaving for good, huh?"

Without Prance, without the diamonds, it would be straightened out in no time. She'd given Kraft a plausible explanation about why she was with Prance. He had nothing else but suspicions and theories. She went over to embrace Mr. Crumbuckle. "Thank you, Mr. Crumbuckle," she whispered in his ear, squeezing his rotund mid-section as hard as her thin arms could squeeze him.

"It was an emergency," he whispered back to her, his arms tentatively and awkwardly encircling her waist.

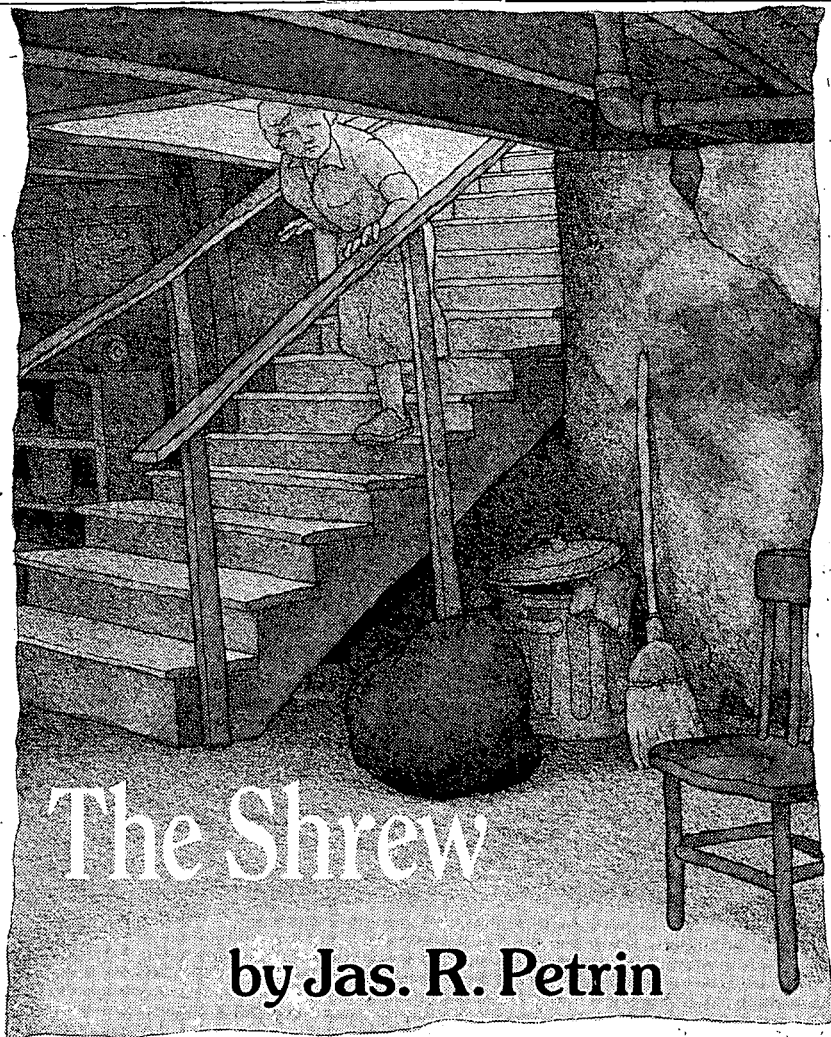
"How can I ever thank you? Why'd you bother?" *You could have turned me in. Had me lined up against the wall to be shot.*

For a moment neither one spoke. Then Mr. Crumbuckle whispered, still embracing her, "You know what love is, Miss Hanson?"

She nodded quickly three or four times and nuzzled her chin into the soft, warm flesh of his neck.

"I'm getting a good idea," she told him truthfully. "I've got a good idea."





# The Shrew

by Jas. R. Petrin

“Anybody hear that Mrs. Mack last night? At it again? Yelling the daylight down?”

Bernadine Barkman’s heavy-lidded eyes probed question-

ingly at her co-workers, all of them busy, hands constantly moving, sorting cans and bottles along the wide folding table in the deep cool dampness of the End of Main school basement.



A room they called the dungeon.

"Her shrieking, him rumbling. Like living next to a pair of wild elephants. Him a bull. Her a cow." She grunted, nodded agreement with herself. "A trumpeting cow. A cow with an attitude. There'll be trouble, wait and see. One day, middle of Burton Street, there they'll be, toe to toe and tusk to tusk, trampling down the town and murdering each other."

Bernadine stuffed a cookie into her mouth, engulfed it with a snap, and worked her pug-nacious jaws like a woman who is an infallible authority on both the future of quarreling couples and elephants. She sat within easy reach of the dainties that were collected and stacked on a folding sideboard by the wall.

Mrs. Wynn said crossly, "You keep at those sweets, Mrs. B., and there won't be none left for the sale tomorrow."

"Lots of women yell," advised Mrs. Provost. Her look implied she could reveal a thing or two about Mrs. Barkman's own trumpeting if she wanted to.

"Sure they do, they all do," conceded Bernadine, reaching, chewing, reaching again, "but Mrs. Mack, she's something else. Your Israelite women, your wall of Jericho? Couldn't teach her nothing. Give her a wall, any wall, that Berlin Wall, the wall

they kept pecking at with hammers on the TV, hand it over and stand clear. Shatter it with a yell. Your Great Wall of China, one shout, *Ho!*, two thousand miles of cracked bricks. A whole skyscraping New York street, the Wall Street—*Yah! Boom!*—they'd know what a crash was then, all right. Don't tell me about Mrs. Mack." She threw Mrs. Aird a sharp look that was the temperature of liquid helium. "Course, *some* folks don't hear nothing, deaf as potted plants, even with both hearing aids strapped in."

"What'd you say?" Mrs. Aird replied.

There were seven of them. All volunteers. The Bon Voyage Fund-Raising Committee for the End of Main Junior High Music Council, sorting contributions of aluminum cans and plastic pop bottles in a drive to send the students to a Paris competition; a mound of each was rising as they delved into the bags and boxes brought by parents, teachers, and kids. "You'd think," said Mrs. Barkman in the tones of an indentured laborer, breaking open yet another bag containing both cans and bottles, "they could sort these damn things at home."

"Be glad we got them." Jill Taylor, committee chairman, sent another armload flying. A tireless worker, she stood to receive the town's Citizen of the

Year award if this drive went well.

"I can see their rooftop, those Macks, from out my attic window," put in Mrs. Provost, as if that ought to count for something, "and they seem awful quiet to me."

"Beats me how you can look at a slope of shingles and know that, but you must of seen it fly up and down a few times," replied Bernadine crossly, "the way she raises the roof."

"No, no. I never saw that." Mrs. Provost, frowning in concentration, scrutinized a bent Diet Coke can as though she felt it might be a forgery. "Course, on the other hand, I never actually been up in my attic."

Bernadine stopped chewing, straightened, and blinked in bewilderment.

"But you just said—I mean, how in the heck—" she broke off, befuddled and angry. "Sometimes, Mrs. Provost, a person's got to wonder what's underneath that silver-at-the-roots, split-at-the-ends, bleached-blond, ragmop head of yours. Can't be a brain. Must be a wad of *True Romance* magazines or something, all scrunched up tight with the corn juice leaking out of 'em."

"What? Make fun of my reading? You should talk. Those dumb plays you're forever hauling out of the library. Always

about murders. That Shakespeare . . ."

"Don't compare Shakespeare with *True Romance*!"

"Why not?" She sniffed, hesitated. "You're just peeved because Mr. Mack started up a Shakespeare club and wouldn't have you in it."

A storm blew up in Bernadine Barkman's eyes.

There was truth in that claim. After opening his bakery, Mack had extended his lease to the building next door, converting the old false-fronted Corona Book Exchange, where the readership had dried up, into an amateur theater which he called the Avon and where he shared readings with other enthusiasts of the Bard. He had several members now, but after an initial meeting he hadn't invited Mrs. Barkman back. Bernadine claimed she'd been mean-mouthed. But gossip had it that Mack was just put off by her high-handed attitude.

Bernadine went back to her grumbling.

"Roof or no roof, I tell you there's nothing sweet about them Macks, only sour. That bakery! A disgrace. It's a wonder they haven't poisoned half the town!"

"Bernadine!"

"Well, it's true. Disgusting place. No hygiene at all. I can't think why we took those day-olds Mack offered us for the

sale. Probably start an epidemic. And then we'll get sued."

"You'd say anything against the Macks," Mrs. Provost chimed in.

"I say what's true. They're a sour pair. Salt and vinegar, and nothing else, and that's all."

"Then sourness must be catching. Like a flu bug, they must of breathed it up when it come floating across their back fence—they *are* your neighbors, aren't they, dear?"

Jill Taylor, Can and Bottle Chairman as well as Carwash Coordinator and Bake Sale Manager, raised her official hands in the air and tuned her official voice. "Ladies, *ladies!* Forget the Macks. If we're going to get those kids off to Paris, we've got to get along for another two weeks."

"Don't tell me, tell this wild woman," Bernadine snarled. "She's the one calling decent people sour."

"Wrong!" snapped Mrs. Provost, "I never called no *decent* people sour."

"*Ladies!*"

Troubled silence reigned. Busy hands toiled on. Aluminum clattered, plastic clacked, Mrs. Barkman chomped away even more furiously at the dainties, and only occasionally did she hurl glances at Mrs. Provost, sharp as swords.

"Seen him in the hardware store today," broke in Mrs. Aird,

bringing the ceasefire to a sudden end. Her thoughts, shaped by just the fragments of what was said around her, were often given to wandering. "Held the door open for him."

"Who'd you see?" Carole Meyers asked.

"What?"

"WHO'D YOU SEE?"

"Well, who'd you think, for Pete's sake? That nice Mr. Mack."

Everyone groaned. Jill Taylor gave a piqued cluck of her tongue.

"Ellen, for heaven's sake, I just asked everyone to drop that subject for a while."

"What?"

"I SAID—"

"I never heard you." Mrs. Aird fussed with one hearing aid till it emitted a loud whistle, then sailed on obliviously. "Hard not to notice a man like that. Real charmer. If I was twenty years younger—"

Bernadine stopped her cruelly. "If you were, you could still play his mother."

"—but there he was at Kehoe's, buying things to turn that rented house into a love nest—"

Bernadine exhaled with a percussive, barking sound, and cookie crumbs flew from her lips.

"I was behind him, see, at the cash register," went on Mrs. Aird, with a glance behind as

if she thought a dog might have wandered in, "and he bought a Swede saw, a box of them giant orange plastic garbage bags, a new spade, and flypaper—that was odd, lucky for him Bob Kehoe hasn't tidied his storeroom since the Korean War. I guess that rented house has got church-type window screens—you know—the holey kind? Ha, ha? And so I said to myself, there's a man ready for yard work, and—"

"Hah!" It was Bernadine. They looked at her.

"Right!" she hollered again, as if to make sure Mrs. Aird heard her, and slammed down a can like an exclamation mark.

"Yard work! If you think a man with a wife like that, with those things in his hands, means to do yard work, then you're even more of a fool than Mrs. Provost here. Stop and think what he *actually* took home to his wild elephant house—to that wild elephant lady of his." She drew herself up like an evangelist. "The ingredients of death, that's what." She leaned forward, with thunder in her eyes and hissed at them:

*"For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble...."*

"Oh, now..." broke in Mrs. Provost.

"Don't you 'Oh, now' me. *I* can see disaster looming. *I* don't need to hear it from a talking head on the TV news. An actual almost-murder, crash!, right in our laps, and what are we doing about it? Zip! Zero! *Nothing!*"

Mrs. Wynn said, "Really, Bernadine, just because somebody buys a shovel, it don't mean—"

"He's a baker. A *mad* baker—warped by all her shouting. And what's the most dangerous thing in the world to put into the hands of a warped, mad baker, next to a bread knife or a rolling pin? *Poison*, that's what!"

"Oh, for God's sake, there wasn't any poison. Only the shovel and the saw and—"

"That's right. All that stuff, the whole damn list. But don't forget—" she smacked a hand down on the tabletop—"that *flypaper!*"

The women traded glances. "Flypaper?" Jill Taylor said.

"Flypaper! Flypaper! You all gone as deaf as Mrs. A.? Deaf *and* blind? Can't see to read your Agatha Christies, your Rendells and Jameses, your Art C. Doyles?"

As well as styling herself the local thespian *par excellence*, Bernadine, among other things, extended her pretensions into the crime writing genre, offering herself as an authority on all things criminal. Through

crime books ordered from the city, she fed on violence.

They sat avoiding her eyes, a row of blank faces round a jumble of bottles and cans. She glowered at them, fierce as a judge, little round patches of passion on her cheeks.

"You boil it," she snarled. "You put flypaper in a pot of water on the stove and you *boil* it! It makes poison."

Silence. Complete and utter. Broken at last by a fidgeting Mrs. Aird who knew she had missed something but didn't know what.

"Poison? That why Bernadine's cookies are so awful?"

"Aaahhhhh!" shrieked Bernadine, dragging two fistfuls of hair straight up. "Aaahhhhh!" With a jump, she sent her chair crashing, came trampling over it and through it and around the table at Mrs. Aird with her ten fingers splayed out, clutching. The other ladies rose up in a wave, metal chairs banging, folding, tipping, collapsing.

Bernadine, reaching, roared a battle cry, "*O, treble woe, fall ten times treble on that cursed head!*"

"Look out. There she goes," cried Mrs. Wynn. "That damn Shakespeare."

"Sit down," Jill Taylor screeched.

"I will fight with her upon this theme, until my eyelids no longer wag!"

"Somebody! Quick! Get her! Hold her!"

Little Mrs. Provost interposed herself. Brave but rash. Mrs. Barkman die-seled over her as though she were there for the die-seleding, sent the smaller woman's round backside plumping flat on the floor against a leg of the folding sideboard that supported the dainties and coffee. The sideboard dipped. Paper cups teetered. The coffee machine swayed.

"Aaaahhh! My Mr. Coffee!" Carole Meyers shrieked.

She lunged to save it. Tripped. The machine toppled forward, launched itself, described a perfect head-end roll to the floor, and disintegrated in a spray of black, steaming liquid.

Bernadine struggled toward Mrs. Aird.

"—would't fight? Would't eat a crocodile?"

Stopped by a wall of women, she contented herself with the launch of a plastic cola bottle at Mrs. Aird, which bounced with a sharp *tonk* off the side of the deaf woman's head. Mrs. Aird sat down wide-eyed as if she'd just received a transmission on one hearing aid while Bernadine vanished in a contiguous mass of ladies that waltzed round her like a dance team, shifting left, then right, until someone's foot found the spilled coffee and skidded, and with fingers digging like hooks

to save themselves the ladies went down in a heap of tangled limbs and screams.

Suddenly it was survival-of-the-fittest time. Bernadine was forgotten. They all lumbered about shrieking in the hot, wet mess on sodden hands and knees.

"I'm scalded, I'm scalded!" hollered Marg Tucker.

"I'm soaked and crippled!" yelled Mrs. Wynn, sitting in the center of the mess, plucking tiny glass shards out of her palms.

"Quiet, everyone!"

*"I'll rant as well as thou!"* Bernadine raged.

They struggled clear. Milling around, sweeping at their clothes with the sides of their hands, moaning and clucking their tongues—miraculously, no one had been seriously cut by the glass. It took all the authority Jill Taylor had left in her to shout the racket down.

"Ladies! Stop it! Ladies!"

Bernadine was steaming—figuratively and literally.

*"I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked!"*

She made a new, energetic dive for Mrs. Aird. Dripping women clasped her, squealing crossly, jostling, and for one terrible moment the disaster seemed about to repeat itself. Jill Taylor climbed onto a chair and cupped her hands around her mouth.

"SIT DOWN, MRS. BARKMAN, THERE'S NO MORE DAMN COFFEE LEFT TO SPILL!"

A hush descended.

"No need to yell," Bernadine grumbled. She was calmer now, histrionics put to flight by Jill Taylor's sharp shout. "Think you're a cop?"

"I'm whatever I have to be," Jill Taylor said, "when it's needed."

"Fine then. Be a cop. And hurry up and arrest that . . . that deaf lady maniac." She pointed at Mrs. Aird. Then she added as if she'd almost forgotten it: "And that crazy damn Mack, the would-be murderer, while you're at it."

Somebody had fetched a stack of paper towels from the washroom, and the ladies were sponging at one another's clothing. A string mop swabbed at the damage. Mrs. Provost was salvaging dainties from the ruin. Jill Taylor said, "Why oh why must you keep on about it, Bernadine?"

"Because nobody listens! Because I try and point out how that trumpeting elephant lady is being plotted into a murder story. Try and explain how her and him are a Bic lighter and a gas tank, about to blow down the town. And the whole stunned bunch of you just sit there."

With a snort and a clatter, she knocked aside her allot-

ment of cans and bottles and picked her sweater up off the floor. Stopped and wrung coffee out of one sleeve.

"Anyway, I've had it with you bunch. Up to here."

She strode from the table, stopped at the heap of dainties and scooped up a couple of boxes, flung the door open, turned and leveled an admonishing finger.

"A baker! With poison! That's something to think about. If you dopes ever think about anything."

"Bernadine," Jill called after her. "Don't go. We got work to do. We—"

"*This above all, to thine own self be true!*" cried Bernadine. "*Exeunt!*" And the crash of a slamming door was the last comment she had for them.

Jill Taylor's phone rang the moment she got home. She was surprised to hear Bernadine Barkman squawking down the line at her. Breathless. No mention of the scene an hour before.

"I got it now, Mrs. President—*El Presidente*—your ladyship! Unsaddle your high horse and listen. Did some thinking. Got the thing figured. It's awful. I know she's a horror, but that Mack's heart must of been scraped out of a freezer in an Alaskan meat locker in January, it's so cold. See, it's those pastries. Those day-olds he's been shoving at us, so damn

smug. I said from the start to take the home baking only and nothing else, but nobody listens to me."

Jill Taylor studied the ceiling, the floor, the phone in her hand, which she put back to her ear and finally said, "What, Bernadine, in the name of all that's holy, are you talking about?"

"That Mack. His murder plan. What else?"

There was a quick sound of munching, as though Bernadine were working over a handful of cookies feverishly.

"See, what made it clear to me, clear as a bell, was this pain I got, sharp in my stomach, the minute I walked out of the dungeon tonight. One jab in the gut, and I seen it all—the whole shebang. Everything."

"Seen—I mean *saw* what?"

"Realized what I'd been doing—nibbling."

"Nibbling!"

"Right. And I must of nibbled something of *his*. By accident, in all the kafuffle. I remember something awful stale. I guess he lets it sit so the main ingredient can sort of spread out and infiltrate that bun, that cookie, shove that poison right on through like some sort of a deadly, dire, damn fungus."

Jill pinched the bridge of her nose between two fingers, closed her eyes, opened them.

"Bernadine, listen. Tonight



you told us how the Macks are a nuisance because of their quarreling. Then, because Mrs. Aird happened to mention a few things Mr. Mack bought at the hardware store, you make a huge jump in logic and tell us he's planning to murder her. And now, if I hear you right, you're saying he intends to do in a bunch of the rest of us, too?"

"He does." More crunching.

"But it doesn't make sense."

"It does."

"It does *not*."

"All part of his plan."

"Bernadine, for heaven's sake, think. If Mr. Mack actually did want to murder his wife—and I don't believe it for a minute, but just supposing he actually did—do you really think he'd afflict the entire town, dozens of innocent people—"

"Hundreds . . . thousands . . ."

"—when all he has to do is simply push her down the stairs or strangle her? Why would he stoop to such a harebrained, awkward scheme?"

"Why? You ask why?" Her breathing quickened. "But that's the *genius* of it, don't you see? The master stroke! Something to confuse the police entirely. I seen through it in ten seconds, soon as I got home. It's to *cover his tracks*." She paused to let that find its level. "Now d'you see the fiendishness? Lace the baked goods, flood the town

through our sale so they're untraceable—kill off *dozens*. Who's going to take special notice of Mrs. Mack, the wild elephant lady's dead body, with the mortuary full right up to the rafters?"

"But what you're suggesting is—well, it's heinous."

"Say what?"

"Heinous. It means—"

"I know what it means." As one of the literati, Bernadine prided herself on her word skills. "You're just pronouncing it wrong." She thought a minute, then not to be outdone, grunted. "I guess, then, you don't know nothing about . . . about . . ."

"About what?"

"About . . . psychomorphs."

"Psychomorphs?"

"You heard me," Bernadine said impatiently. "Psycho' as in nut case. 'Morph' as in—something else. You're not the only one knows the English language around here."

Renewed munching. Something gooey. Perhaps a brownie.

"But if you ate his pastries, Bernadine, why aren't you dead?"

"I only nibbled."

"Bernadine, I'm hanging up."

"You can't. Not with a killer on the loose."

"There isn't any killer on the loose."

"I just *proved* it."

"I'm hanging up now, Bernadine."

"You can't!"

"I am."

A sibilant hatred came out of the phone, a venomous hiss of resentment and spite.

"Right, *Mizz* President! Madame Citizen of the Damn Year. That all you care about—your lousy award? Don't you see, now I figured out this plot, my own life isn't worth two cents? Don't you care about that?" She paused to let a flood of bitterness wash down the line. Then she said, "Maybe I should of realized something sooner. Maybe I should of seen through *your* part in this darn horror story."

"My part? What in heaven's name are you talking about now?"

"Clear as crystal. He's got to have a helper. Hell, maybe a whole *lot* of helpers. A *committee* of them."

"Bernadine? *Bernadine!* Get back on this line! Don't you dare go around saying a thing like that! Don't you—*Bernadine!*"

**M**r. Mack stood quietly behind the window of his back side door, just as he had for the past—he checked his watch—eleven minutes. His legs ached. With the press of his thumb against the shade, he could see the back window of his neighbor—Mrs. Mouth-Like-a-Barn-Door Barkman.

She had big eyes, too.

Earlier, he was sure he had seen her curtain move. The old warthog was spying on him. What had she seen? He knew she didn't have to see much to start a whispering campaign that would blanket the country, the pretentious, overbearing shrew.

He let the shade fall back. Flexed his knees slightly to relieve the pain in his calves. If he had known this, if he had known that . . . Well, he hadn't known, and there it was, and now he would just have to deal with it.

He didn't have to like it, though.

He still could not believe it had come to this. Speaking of shrews, his new bride had proved so difficult, so impossible, forever shrieking noon and night at him, even sometimes physically assaulting him, like a modern Katharina, Shakespeare's shrew, *to comb his noodle with a three-legged stool!* And he, alas, was no Petruchio. He had tamed his shrew, yes, but he may have gone a trifle heavy-handed there. Yes, just a trifle heavy-handed.

He paced. Trod the floor five steps one way, about face, five steps the other way, about face. He found himself peering out the window again.

The time had come to pick up and leave this lousy town. But

he still had a wretched neighbor woman to deal with. What had she seen? What had she seen?

He had seen to one shrew already. He could surely take care of another one.

*If I be waspish, best beware my sting!*

**T**he police weren't concerned in the least. They stood and looked at her as if she were an exhibit on loan from the nuthouse, and then held the door open for her and told her to go home and have a good liedown.

And so Bernadine went downtown, like the solid citizen she was, to spread the alarm herself.

"It's clear when you scratch your head and think about it, that we got a hy-eenious" (she had taken a liking to that word, correcting Jill's pronouncing of it) "crime happening, right here in our very own town, plain as the nose on your face."

This with a glance at Wolverton—whose nickname had sprung from an old song about a mountain because he sported a nose of geologic proportions—one of the listless male group that lined the wall at Al's Gas-O-Hol talking man-talk when they weren't pushing their paychecks as fast as they could manage it across the bar at the Netley Hotel. It was still two

days till payday. Bernadine had an audience.

"What's 'hy-eenious'?" Wilmer Gates asked with the button-eyed stare he always had, which made him look as if someone crept up on him first thing every morning and slapped him awake with a shovel.

"You know. Beastly." She wished she had thought to look up the derivation. "From—let's see—from the word 'hyena.' That's probably it. Like something beastly a hyena might do and then sit back and laugh about."

"Lemme get this straight," said Chuck Lang, a plodder who liked to work a thing through with instructions. He folded his arms, showing denim elbows worn white from years of buffing tables at the Netley. "You got your flypaper, you take an' ravel it out, boil it..." He pulled at his ear. "But where around here would you get flypaper from in the first place?"

"Kehoe, that dunce, still has it in his store. Army surplus probably. Korean War."

Chuck Lang looked skeptical. "Right. So you take it, an' boil it, an' stir it. Pour it, an' cool it, an' then you got... what?"

"Arsenic, you dipstick. What they used to use for fly poison, rat poison—same difference."

"Rat poison?"

"You heard me. Now, ask

yourselves, all of you. What would a baker want with rat poison?"

"Maybe," said Wilmer Gates, hawking deep in his throat and spitting an unhealthy looking substance into the grease pit between the polished pointy toes of his cowboy boots, "maybe to kill a rat."

"Rats to you! Why not *buy* rat poison in the first place, then? You got rats on the brain because of all the rats right here—" she gestured with contempt "—these ones with no tails."

A howl went up. Big Al put his thick face out of the front office to see what was going on. The men grinned, elbowed one another, shuffled their feet, winked.

Bernadine arched her eyebrows fiercely. "Let's stick to the point. What about that saw, that spade, those bags, big as bodies? Toss that in with the poison, and what have you got?" she asked.

"Agrave-robbing kit?" Chuck Lang said brightly.

Loud catcalls, hoots, and grunts.

"Laugh, you dopes. Bunch of morons. If you don't see mass murder creeping up on the town, and not lift a hand to stop it, then I just don't know. He gets away with this and one of *you* might be next."

"We don't eat cookies."

"That so? Sideslipping home

from the Netley, full load on, staggering, you'd eat anything. *Bang!*, someone jumps out, shoves a jelly buster at you, and there you are, poisoned on the spot, right up to your guggle..."

She watched their weathered faces, bleary eyes, Adam's apples bobbing. She pressed on:

"... then he unzi-i-i-ips you with that saw! So-o-o-orts you out into different sized hunks! Pa-a-a-cks up your parts! You'd be in the bag then, all right, once and for all. Lost in a shallow ditch out Highway Nine."

Chuck Lang jerked his thumb. "Couldn't lose Melynychuk here in no shallow ditch—not with his gut."

There was a bray of agreement.

Pete Melynychuk shuffled forward with a cigar in his teeth, a man reputed to be tough as a baked boot. Humped brow, eyes like a pit bull with a problem on its mind.

"Whaddaya mean, us *next*? No one's murdered yet."

"They will be," Bernadine snapped. "I'll murder *you* if you don't get that ten cent bug-fogger out of my face."

This brought vast enjoyment. Huge mirth. "Kick him in the grease pit, Bernie," someone howled out of the fuss and ruckus:

"Kick *her* in, Petey," yelled somebody else

She'd lost them now. She saw that. She could only holler them down with her fists on her hips.

"Bunch of blathering nut cases. Nuts with clothes on. Nuts with beer bellies and cowboy boots. Worse than those damn women up there at the school."

She turned for the door. *"The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!"*

"What women at the school?" growled Pete. She turned and looked at him. He held his cigar out delicately like a stubby antenna ready to receive an alert. The others fell silent.

"What women? Spitting and spoiling the air in here all day, yapping and yapping for hours on end, and you have to ask me what women?" A thought sprang to her mind; a last chance to save these idiots from themselves.

"You mean you don't even know when you're being cheated and robbed?"

"Cheated and robbed? Cheated and robbed? What're ya sayin'? What are ya sayin'?"

They bellied up, bristling. Poisoning they could laugh at, their livers were impervious. But to be cheated and robbed—unless done all legal and proper there up the street in the Netley Bar—well, that was something else.

"What's the story, Bernie? Tell us! Right now!"

"Her story changes every five minutes," Marg Tucker said.

No one on the committee knew for certain what rumors Bernadine Barkman was spreading, they were far too busy for that. But they knew she was up to something when the flow of can and bottle donations diminished sharply to a trickle, then, like a stream denied runoff from higher ground, finally dried up altogether. When their afternoon car wash, despite signs nailed to tree trunks and handbills stuffed into mailboxes, left the volunteers standing around the lot at the Mac's Milk with dry rags and empty buckets, grumbling and stifling yawns. And when their Sundaybakesale, usually a sell-out, had Mrs. Provost complaining she had to take more cookies away with her than she'd brought.

Trouble.

A fretful Jill Taylor called a crash committee meeting.

"What's got into that woman? She's decided to sink us, and she's doing it, too. Might as well of used a torpedo. I'm shocked and appalled. Doesn't she know it's the kids who'll suffer? What lies has she been blabbing?"

Mrs. Provost spoke up.

"Mrs. Wynn is out and about this minute learning what's going on. She's got more con-

tacts than an optometrist. Not to worry."

But Jill Taylor did worry. From every direction. A geometry teacher couldn't have thought up more angles to it. And when Mrs. Wynn finally waddled in with her cheeks as pink as two little hot water bottles, Jill led the stampede to get the exhausted woman's coat off and help her to a chair and sit her down and press a paper cup of Carole Meyers' wretched tea at her.

Mrs. Wynn barely had strength to push the tea away.

"Tell us, Mrs. W.," prompted Jill Taylor, leaning forward with a hand on each knee like an interrogator. "What's that female U-boat, torpedo-shooting *Kriegsmariner* doing to us? Tell us quick, we're holed at the waterline, sinking fast."

"Sinking," gasped Mrs. Wynn, drubbing her breastbone with a hollowed fist, burping and then putting her fingers primly to her mouth. "Me too. Know how much tea I drank today? How much coffee? I breathe with a gurgle. Walk with a slosh. I'm the *Exxon Valdez* before it leaked."

"Don't leak on us," said Mrs. Provost, shifting away.

"League? What league?" asked Mrs. Aird, who had both hearing aids whistling like tiny tea kettles.

"TELL US WHAT HAPPENED!" Jill Taylor yelled.

Mrs. Wynn told them.

At Lucille Greenlaw's store, she'd shared a pot of tea. "Awful stuff—rose hip. But if anybody knows the gossip, it's Lucille—nose so close to the ground you might step on it. Inch of rain and she'd drown." Lucille had some chin-rocking news. "Said our committee is some sort of gang of common criminals, conspirators in some local, hy-eenious—"

Mrs. Provost wanted to know what hy-eenious meant.

"Heinous," Jill Taylor broke in impatiently. "*Hey-nous*."

"*She* said hy-eenious. A murder plot. And that people are asking what's happened to all the money we've extorted out of the town."

The members were aghast. Jill Taylor emitted a tiny, drawn squeak as if a knife had slipped into her back and let some steam out.

"What'd she say, what'd she say?" Mrs. Aird thumbed her hearing aids. "Hy-eenious?"

"*Hey-nous*," Mrs. Provost told her. "A *hey-nous* plot." Then she turned to Marg Tucker. "What's *hey-nous* mean?"

"Something bad, I guess," Marg told her, "where people turn around and go *Hey!*"

"What?" Mrs. Aird replied, hearing aids shrieking.

Carole Meyers groaned at the chaos and almost barked at

Mrs. Aird: "Will you get those tubings fixed?"

"Lucille ought to know," Mrs. Wynn said. "Ears like CIA microphones, she don't miss much."

"Where'd you go next?"

Mrs. Wynn burped. "To see Garage Sale Jim. You know—the man with an interest in every damn thing that ever was? Rolls-Royces, hair-nets, squashed cans in the parking lot?" They knew him. Who didn't? "Well, you should of seen the cup he drank out of—black as Newgate's knocker. These bachelors! Served me Chinese tea from a crate. Three cups. Instant. Whitener powder floating in it—"

"For God's sake, will you get on with it?"

Mrs. Wynn looked miffed. "Said he heard us women were stuffing our wallets. Secret bank accounts on a mountain in Switzerland—"

"Outrageous," burst out Jill Taylor.

"Said he also heard we been helping in a murder plot. And that Mrs. Aird here spent hours with a killer, helping him purchase 'ingredients of death.'"

Astonishing them all, Mrs. Aird heard that. She came to her feet as if tossed up on springs.

"I'll slap that damn woman silly! Drag her by the hair and knock her down and sit on her like she done to me when we

were kids, and I won't let her up till her face turns black and her tongue pokes out like a dill pickle!"

"She won't be able to get up if you do that," observed Mrs. Provost logically.

"What'd you say?" Mrs. Aird shot back.

Mrs. Provost's sigh whistled in and then out.

Jill Taylor's eyes had a far-away sheen to them as if she were watching her Citizen of the Year award winging off into obscurity. She said, "I'm the president." She crushed her plastic coffee cup in her fist. "If anybody gets to kill that woman, by God it's going to be me."

Jill was so upset she might have gone straight out and done it too, there and then. Might have, that is, if she hadn't been knocked clean off her feet an hour later by a pain that sliced through her innards like one of those knives on TV that could "cut meat so thin your in-laws would *never* come back."

She was heading home. It took her suddenly. Hit her hard, made her grunt and fold up on the bench in front of the Rexall store. "Woof!" she said, pressing her side. "Ohhhh, woof!"

Big Bill Michaelson, pushing out of the Rexall with a prescription bag in his hand, stopped and hunched over her, his brown lizard face lined and concerned.



"You all right, Mrs. Taylor?"

"I'm—I don't know."

"Hope you're not comin' down with it, too."

An alarm went off in some vault in her mind.

"Coming down with what?"

"Dunno what, Mrs. Taylor, but that's how my wife got started. Hell of a pain. Under her ribs. Sort of, she said, like false teeth, swallowed by accident, gnawing their way out. Same with you?"

Jill Taylor nodded. A terrible misgiving was beginning to assert itself. When she spoke her voice came out like that hollow whisper of a person stricken. And that's what I am, she thought with astonishment, stricken and struck.

"Your wife . . . is she . . . ?"

He shook his huge head slowly. His piercing blue eyes seemed shadowed, though the sun beat down on them brightly.

"Not good. Hit her bad. Dug away at her all last evening. By early morning her eyes were . . . well, like yours."

"Like mine?"

"Yeah. All gloopy."

"Gl—gloopy?"

"Uh-huh."

He began moving off.

"I took her to the doc first thing this morning. Doc says lots of people are coming down with this—whatever it is. Better see him yourself. Before . . ." He shook his head fore-

bodingly, clambered into his Dodge Ram pickup, and leaned his head out the window. "And ain't it too bad about the bakery? We always used to get our bread there." Then he rumbled away.

Jill Taylor sat where she was. Across the street was the plate glass door to Mack's Honey Fresh Bakery. A sign, slightly askew, hung behind the sheen of the glass. She fumbled in her purse for her glasses.

Mrs. Mack was not in her usual place behind the counter.

And the sign in the window said CLOSED.

Jill Taylor struggled home, dropped onto the sofa, picked up the phone, and dialed fast. Missed a number. Yelped with annoyance and dialed again.

Mrs. Provost answered and said, yes, funny Jill should ask but she'd had a darn achey feeling in the pit of her own stomach all day, too. And, yes, like Jill, she had taken a bite out of one of Mack's day-old doughnuts that morning.

"And you say Big Bill Michaelson's wife has it, too? And now the Honey Fresh Bakery's all closed up?" Mrs. Provost sounded worried. "Whew. Now you listen to *this*. I just got a call from Bernadine—brassy thing, after what she's done—and she's hot as a hair iron. Just blathering. Said she called you first, but you weren't home.

Wailing that nobody'll listen to her, that Mrs. Mack has disappeared just like she predicted, and that now her own life isn't worth a nickel. 'Course, I laughed in her face—well, in her ear, anyways — but now . . .” She paused. “You thinking what I'm thinking?”

“I'm thinking what you're thinking, if you're thinking what I'm thinking.”

They both breathed hugely.

“My God. You don't suppose the old war machine actually knew what she was talking about? That those day-olds from the Honey Fresh we been flogging around the town have been actually . . . well . . . fiddled?”

“I don't know. But if she's right, and we didn't listen, and we didn't even help her when she begged us to, then we're going to have a lot of explaining to do.” Jill closed her eyes; she still couldn't believe it. “We've got to call the police. Call them *now!*”

“Hold on. I'm with you all the way, like the damn phone company, but we got to be sure. We could get sued or something for false alarm. Let's check out the smoke before shouting fire in a crowded theater.”

A new onslaught of pain assailed Jill Taylor, flung her mind whirling through a place where bakers with vats of poison spun and winked and she gripped the phone and hung

onto it as if it were the panic bar on a roller coaster that she didn't want to ride.

“You okay?” Mrs. Provost asked.

“Never better.”

“Don't need the doc?”

“I'm fine.”

“Right, then. Call Bernadine. Be nice. Find out all you can. Especially about Mrs. Mack being missing. I'll phone Mrs. Aird. She's got a car. If you can't get ahold of Bernadine, we got to get over there to her place fast. She might be in danger.” She hesitated, as if surprised to find herself giving the orders. “You *sure* you're all right?”

“Fit as a fiddle,” Jill Taylor said.

She hung up the phone and sat for a moment with one hand clutching her side.

“A fiddle that something nasty crawled into and then threw up in and died.”

She dialed Bernadine Barkman.

**B**ernadine was pacing. Sending little Richter Scale tremors through the floorboards to shake the kitchen cupboards to make the dishes rattle. Her phone rang, but she ignored it. She couldn't expect help from anyone. There was no use even in calling the police. She had closed that avenue with her complaints, framed her thoughts

badly and come across as a crank. Now she was pegged as a nutcase. A woman of bent and abundant imaginings.

Mrs. Mack the trumpeter, the destroyer of worlds, was silent. Had been all day. But was she dead? What if she was only half dead? What if she needed help?

So if she was going to help the missing wild elephant lady, she had to do it alone. Alone! And hers the next name on the hit list. She shivered. Still, if there was a chance of saving a life, she had to risk it. And there'd be a victory in that. At least no one would question her alarms in the future.

What to do?

Reconnaissance.

Maybe first slip out into the yard right now and try for a clear sneaky peek into a window. She could do that much without leaving her yard. She had a right to be out in her own yard, hadn't she? A right to see how her tomato plants were doing, the ones planted along the fence barely ten feet from the Macks' basement wall—and window. But if that murdering psychomorph came out of his house and caught her at it, then—

She swallowed.

Her throat was dry.

She went outside.

The tomatoes were fine, and she took their plump weight in

her hand, breathed in their pungent scent as if tomatoes were the focus of her entire being, while all the time her eyes and her brain and every atom of whatever it was that defined Bernadine Barkman as a living, sentient person remained riveted on the rain-dappled dusty glass of those next door basement panes.

Three panes in a wooden frame. And a thin cotton curtain for privacy, not quite closed. She couldn't see much through its gap, but what she did see made her head go round.

Orange!

Those garbage bags!

She just had to see more!

Trembling, she stood upright and looked over the fence to the back of the lot. *O, Mrs. Mack, where wilt thou lead me? Speak!* The Mack station wagon was gone. Which meant the coast was clear. She could creep up close to the house and stare into any window she liked. But just in case, she darn well better have an excuse.

What she needed was a passport. A reason for being there. Hadn't Mack been generous to the committee? Mightn't it be a natural thing to offer him token payment in kind? She thought she knew what that passport might be.

The oven popped and creaked. Was this how Mack had baked

the final cupcake, tart, or muffin which had stifled the elephant lady's trumpetings? His outspread recipe book, like this, listing the use of every ingredient—save one. The one that had waited for twenty, thirty years in wide, flat coils on a shelf in Kehoe's storeroom until Mack had carried it home in a paper bag, whistling.

Her oven bell dinged.

She took the tray out of the oven and slid the cookies onto the slatted wooden racks by the sink to cool. Bent over and sniffed them. Delicious. She ate a couple.

Then, dusting a smudge of chocolate from her sleeve, she hurried off to find a box and something to tie it with.

A special delivery for the elephant man.

With a pretty pink ribbon around it.

Her passport.

“**S**ure hope she hasn't gone and done anything foolish,” Mrs. Provost said, and Jill Taylor replied, “She's always foolish. That's what I like about her.”

They were in Mrs. Aird's car, holding on for dear life, for Mrs. Aird was driving as if the radio had forecast no tomorrow.

Jill Taylor said, “We were wrong, terribly wrong, ignoring Bernadine like that. I thought

it was the right thing to do, the only thing, but we were wrong, and that's all.” She seized Mrs. Aird's elbow. “Watch that bike!”

“What?” replied Mrs. Aird, swerving.

“She's deaf, not blind,” Mrs. Provost said reprovingly.

Jill Taylor dabbed at her eyes with a sodden tissue. “I should have realized she was jealous of my Citizen of the Year award. I told myself all that mattered was the kids. Get the kids to Paris, I told myself. And now look. Poor Bernadine might be—Well, you know. That saw! Those orange bags!”

“Mrs. Taylor, you listen to me, about these pains, I—”

“On the TV news you see people who've done terrible things. Evil people. And it's like there's this beast hiding there behind their face, and peering out their eyeholes—”

“Mrs. Taylor, I'm trying to—”  
“—gives you a chill, like a cold draft, unexpected. Well, a minute ago I looked in the mirror and sure enough, there it was.”

“There what was?” asked Mrs. Provost, derailed by curiosity.

“The Beast.”

“Beast? Look, Mrs. Taylor, if you could only listen a second; I got something worth saying here, too. It's... Heck. What kind of beast?”

“The Murder Beast! Here. Behind my very own face.” Jill

Taylor bent into a quivering, pitiable bundle.

Driving with one hand, Mrs. Aird jimmied her hearing aids, got them whistling, turned them down again. She cut off a cement truck, which blared and careened on by like a freight train.

"Careful!" Mrs. Provost warned. She'd been wanting to say that her pains had subsided, but now she abandoned that.

Jill Taylor was crying. Wet streaks crept down her face.

"We did all that work, and she almost ruined us—it was only natural to be mad at her. But I never once thought she was in danger. If anything's happened to her—" Jill Taylor broke off. When she spoke again, her official voice had a quiver in it. "It's against the law to let someone get killed and not help. There's a word for that—I don't know . . ."

"Bernadine would know it."

"Yes. Yes, she would."

Mrs. Aird's worried eyes turned to look at them. She was the kind of driver who could not speak without looking to see where her message was going, as if her words and not the car might do the greater damage. Her face was red and puffy, too.

"Oh, Mrs. Taylor, there'll go your Citizen of the Year award. And my Harold, when he finds out, well, he'll probably murder

me, and—oh, Bernadine, don't *die!*" she bawled out suddenly. The car veered erratically.

Jill Taylor pointed at the road, her mouth making silent entreaties to the gods. Mrs. Provost, a martyr to danger, patted Mrs. Aird's arm. "There, there. I'm sure she's not dead yet, dear."

Mrs. Aird gaped at her, bug-eyed.

"Oh, no, that's awful!"

And she bore down harder on the accelerator.

The door was unlatched. And so Bernadine went in. She couldn't help herself. Maybe poor Mrs. Mack was still alive, tucked in an orange garbage bag, her mouth stuffed full of flypaper.

She tiptoed slowly, silently, through the rooms. One by one they revealed themselves—abandoned. Only the rented furniture remained. Mr. Mack had packed up and gone.

"Mrs. Mack," she whispered. "Elephant lady. I've come to rescue you."

Here was the kitchen. The floor creaked.

She set the cookies on the counter.

Here was the cellar door.

She opened it.

Here was the basement.

The staircase fell away sharply. She expected shadows, cobwebs, gloom, but down be-

low a light had been left on. And the oblong of cellar floor that she could see seemed as chill and forbidding as a . . .

"... a murder room," she said huskily.

And just at that moment a board groaned behind her and a hand touched the small of her back. As her blood turned to water and her will slipped into a paralytic shock, a gently mocking voice at her ear whispered:

*"Murder most foul, as in the best it is . . ."*

"Faster!" Mrs. Provost urged.

"What?" Mrs. Aird took her eyes from the road long enough to stray up a lawn and turn an ornamental juniper into ragweed. A man rushed from the house with his fists up.

"Be careful," cried Jill Taylor.

"Almost there." Mrs. Aird took the next corner with a howl of rubber and sent a Volkswagen scurrying for cover.

Mack frog-walked her down into the cellar and sat her on a straight-backed chair, facing him. His face was grinning slightly but it was an empty expression, no joy in it. Bernadine felt terror seek her like a hawk and sink its talons into her heart. *You're not tied up, she told herself, not yet, so jump, leap, gallop up those stairs like*

*a pony, kick down the door and escape!*

But she could only grit her teeth as if she had a bit between them. She managed:

"You killed your wife, didn't you?"

He grinned at her.

"You poisoned her with that flypaper, and you took that saw, and you . . . you . . ."

His grin didn't falter.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Do you really want me to answer that?"

He sounded earnest and conciliatory, like a doctor with an unfavorable prognosis. She saw that, unlike the rest of the house, this cellar room had not yet been cleared of his effects. He took a large book in his hand.

"Do you know what this is? Yes, I'm sure you do." He read her the title anyway: *"The Complete Works of William Shakespeare . . ."*

Bernadine waited.

"That's wrong, you know. It ought to be *The Incomplete Works of William Shakespeare*." He thumped one finger down on the table of contents. "Here. *The Taming of the Shrew*. I think old Will ran out of gas in that one. Harsh in so many other plays, dealing out death like a magistrate, and yet he lets that harpy Kate go unscathed. Now, that is some-

thing I have never understood. She practically begs to be murdered, doesn't she?"

Bernadine jumped as he threw one arm out, arched his back, and bellowed in rolling tones: "Will you mew her up . . . this fiend of hell . . . and make her bear the penance of her tongue?"

This guy's a loony, Bernadine thought. "Why'd you do it?" she managed.

He blinked. "*Thinkest thou any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?*"

"Hell's what you got now. You got it for yourself. The hot seat. Front row, center."

His face narrowed with astonishment.

"*Thou didst hear her not? . . . scold, and raise up such a storm that mortal ears might hardly endure the din?*"

"I heard her. The whole town heard her. The folks down in Grand Forks and Fargo heard her. That's no excuse."

"No excuse? *You wish me to a shrewd ill-favored wife? Though she chide as loud as thunder, when the clouds in autumn crack?*"

Bernadine got slowly to her feet. This was not the fearsome and formidable creature she had imagined. Just some skinny wacko posturing and blathering the Bard at her. *At her!* There was no sitting still for this. When it came to quoting Shakespeare, she could give as

good as she got. She hollered:

*"Have I not in my time heard lions roar?"*

*Have I not heard the sea, puff'd up with winds,*

*Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?"*

His eyes flew open. Wide. He looked at her as if she had metamorphosized. She took a threatening step towards him, and he retreated, backed up to the stairs. He was staring at her in amazement. She shook her finger at him and hissed a bold lie in a stage whisper, "The cops are coming, you know . . ." Then she smote her breast:

*"And do you tell me of a woman's tongue;*

*That gives not half so great a blow to hear*

*As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?"*

"Hey," he said, stepping back, stumbling, "cops, that's not fair." He fumbled for a reply. But the electricity had gone out of his voice. "*Was . . . was ever gentleman as grieved as I?*"

"How now, my friend!" she shot back, "*why dost thou look so pale?*"

He crablegged it backwards up the stairs. She marched after him into the kitchen, picked up the cookies she'd brought, and threw them at him. He got his



feet back under him there, fended her off, and rattled the front door open. "Get away. Let me go." He swallowed. "*O most pernicious woman.*"

*"O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!"*

She took another swipe at him, grabbed his sleeve. He fought to escape her.

"Let me go!"

*"I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first."*

Suddenly the fight went out of him. His face went pale. He froze, made a grimace of pain, and put his hand to his stomach. "Oh!" he said. "Oh dear, I don't feel so good, I . . ."

Bernadine felt a surge of triumph. "Hah!" She plucked up a kitchen chair and brandished it at him. "Sampling your own work, huh? A flypaper cupcake! Couple of flypaper cookies. A hy-eenious outrage. You psychomorph. You ought to be ashamed—"

"Fl—flypaper?" He shook his head.

"Don't play dumb."

He was looking pastier and weaker by the minute. But he managed to raise one trembling hand into the air, pointing. Risking a quick glance over her shoulder, she saw the coil of flypaper depending from the ceiling, spiraling down speckled with dead flies, not four feet from her head.

"Oh, damn," she said as she

felt his fingers at her throat.

She hit her attacker with the chair.

"A lfred Deeming, Johann Otto Hoch, Bela Kiss—heard of them? No, I guess not." Bernadine Barkman stood with Jill Taylor, Mrs. Provost, and Mrs. Aird. She rattled on. "Henri Landru, John George Haigh . . . all of them wife killers, every one. I got a book at home, I can lend it to you." She waved the newspaper, the front page photo of Mr. Mack, late of the Honey Fresh Bakery, late of the Avon theater group, now bowed and cowed in the back of a police van. "Know what he is?" she blustered indignantly. "Why, he's nothing but a . . . a pseudomorph!"

"A what?" they all asked together.

"You heard me. 'Pseudo' as in fake. 'Morph' as in . . . as in whatever the heck it is! He didn't poison that poor elephant lady—he strangled her." Suddenly she adopted a more humble tone. "I was wrong about the flypaper, wasn't I?"

They nodded.

"Wrong about the plot against the town?"

They nodded again.

"Know what I heard?" Mrs. Aird said. They ignored her.

"The doc says it's just a wave

of stomach flu hit the town," Jill said. "Not food poisoning, not any kind of poisoning."

"But you were right about everything else. If you hadn't suspected the flypaper, right from the day Mrs. Aird mentioned it, then you wouldn't have finally gone in there, would you? And you were right about the most important part," Mrs. Provost said soothingly, "the murder part. And you even managed to stop him. Stop him right in his tracks." She looked troubled for a moment. "Good thing we got there when we did, though, or he'd be even sorrier than he is now—that chair." Then she brightened. "But maybe you saved some other woman from that same awful fate."

"Know what I heard?" Mrs. Aird put in again. They turned to her.

"You," said Bernadine with undisguised skepticism, "heard something?" Bernadine was edging away, heading home.

"I heard," said Mrs. Aird, gazing at Bernadine with an almost schoolgirl look of adulation, "that the girls in the mayor's office say you been put to the top of the short list now for the Citizen of the Year award."

Jill Taylor balanced, swayed, seemed about to fall over. Bernadine's chin stuck out even farther. "Well," she said. She seemed to swell up an inch or two. "Well. You don't say so." She took a few steps, then turned back and looked at them. "But I suppose that's only right when you stop and think about it." Then she walked quickly off down the street toward home, whistling.

"My God. There'll be no living with her now," Jill Taylor breathed. She took a few tottering steps.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Provost called.

"Back down to that dungeon. We got those darn brats still to send off to Paris, don't we?"

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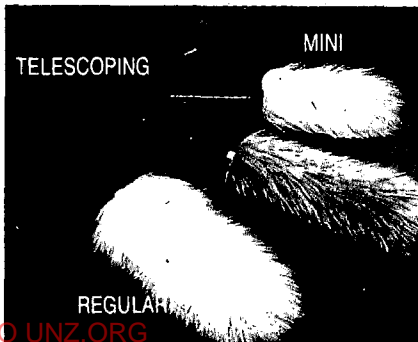
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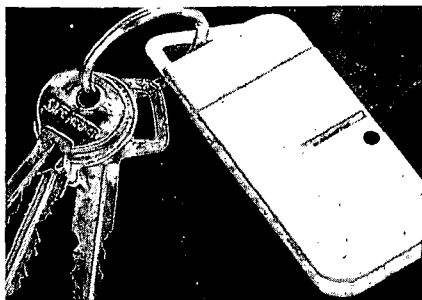
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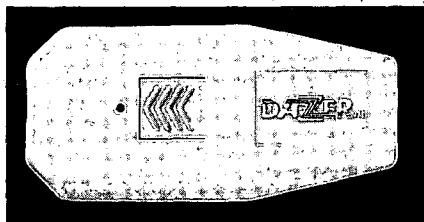


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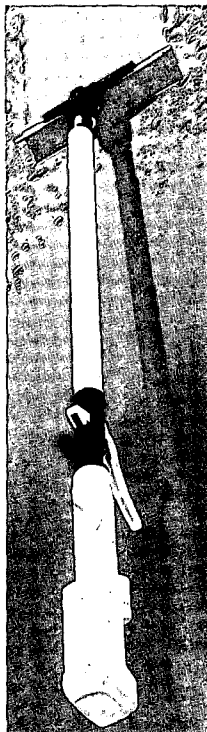
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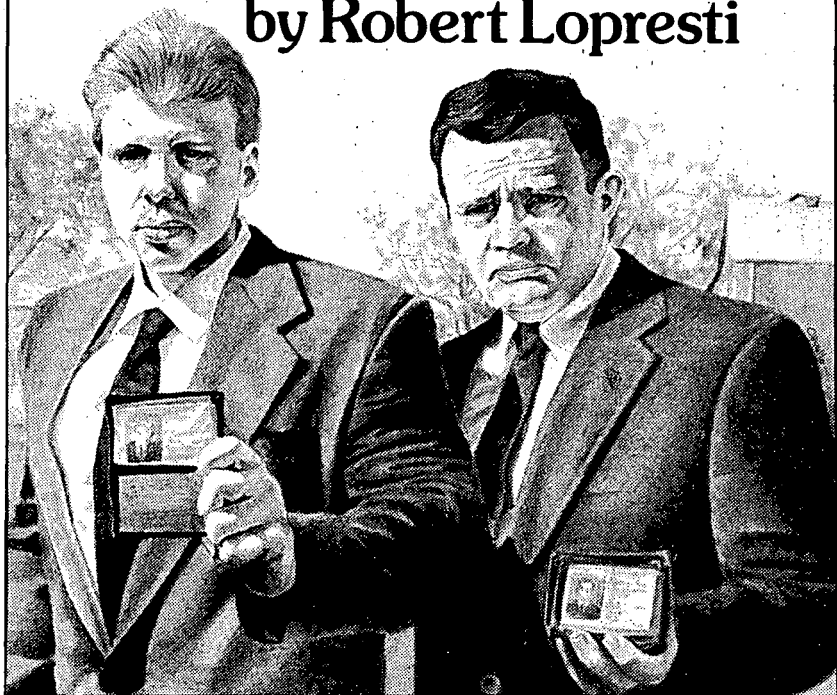
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# The Federal Case

by Robert Lopresti



**T**hey said they were federal agents and they had proof. Great heaps of proof.

The official identification they carried was little cards with glossy photos, but I was more impressed by the conservative suits and the total void where a sense of humor ought to be.

Yup. Federal agents.

The blond man was Bach, from the New York office of one of your favorite law enforcement bureaus. The tanned one was Alvarez, on loan from the Chicago office of a different agency. Uncle Sam's assorted nephews were cooperating on this deal.

Just as they expected me to do.

"We trust we can count on your cooperation, Mr. Crow."

I sat at my desk and tried to remember the last time the government asked me for anything except taxes. Had I sent in my census form? I thought so.

"Well, I'll do my best." I hoped they had researched me thoroughly. They'd know my best was nothing to get excited about.

Bach opened his notebook and cleared his throat. I tried to look alert.

"Tully Rowson," he recited from the page. "Did you know him?"

"Tully? May he rest in peace. Of course I did."

"Tell us about him."

I nodded. "How much?"

"Everything you know."

"You misunderstood. I'm a private detective. I get paid for information. How much are you offering?"

Twin frowns. Much confering between conservative suits.

"We're asking for your cooperation in a matter of vital national interest, Mr. Crow. As a public-spirited citizen..."

"No money. I get it." I sighed.

Bach looked firmly at his notebook. "Tully Rowson?"

"A fisherman. Also a terrific amateur photographer. He ran a boat out of Great Egg until he

washed overboard, poor guy. We were casual friends, or close acquaintances. I knew him for years."

"Do you know his address?"

"He lived on his boat, as far as I know, but he'd come up here to Atlantic City from time to time."

"When did you last see him?"

"About a month ago. We went to the boat races together." And lost a bundle betting on long shots, but there was no need to mention that.

"You had no contact with him after that?" asked Alvarez. "No letters? No phone calls?"

"No. Look, what's the point? The guy went out alone and fell overboard in a storm. It's tragic and all that, but why make a federal case out of it? You should pardon the expression."

Bach ignored my outburst, presumably because it wasn't in his notebook. "Did Mr. Rowson have any relatives or friends in Morris County?"

"Morris County? Heck no. Look, you guys had better answer some questions, too."

They looked at each other and shrugged in unison. "This has to be confidential, Mr. Crow."

"Sure. What gives?"

"We have reason to believe Mr. Rowson was murdered. When the Coast Guard found his fishing boat, there were

signs of a struggle. The boat had been searched and, as you know, the body has never been found."

"Poor Tully. But that begs the question: why are you guys involved? There's no federal law against murder."

"Local authorities are investigating that aspect, of course. But we have a special interest, an overriding interest, you might say. Mr. Rowson was working for us when he died." I gawked. "Doing what? Fishing?"

"As you yourself pointed out, Mr. Rowson was a keen amateur photographer."

This was true. Tully's seascapes, his pictures of crumbling old boats and occasionally of crumbling old sailors, were well beyond family album quality. A gallery here in Atlantic City was stocking his work, although I didn't know if they'd sold any.

"You sent Tully out in his fishing boat to take pictures of something," I guessed. "The fishing boat looked harmless, and if anybody saw him, he was a well-known shutterbug. Is that the idea?"

Bach nodded. "Are you familiar with Dotterman Disposal Corporation?"

I was. Dotty is based in Newark, but you could hardly pick up a newspaper anywhere

without hearing about their being indicted on charges of dumping illegal waste in some scenic location. They were just trying to turn a buck by fertilizing the Garden State with radon, asbestos, medical waste, and so on. As far as I knew, the prosecutors hadn't made any indictments stick.

"Dotterman's been dumping garbage off the Shore?" I guessed.

"More than garbage this time," said Alvarez. "Our informants say they've been dumping corpses with the trash. Some gang members who wanted a share of the waste market."

"And you sent Tully out alone to face these pirates," I said. "Nice work, guys."

The two agents looked at each other as if they were jointly composing a note for my file.

Finally Bach flipped a page in his book. "Mr. Rowson normally had his film developed at a professional lab here in Atlantic City.

"For our purposes he agreed to develop the film himself. We wanted to keep direct contact to a minimum, so we supplied him with enough money to rent a safe house and set up a darkroom in the basement."

"That's what we want," said Alvarez, with sudden passion. "That darkroom. The film."



I frowned. "I thought you said he died on the mission."

"It was his second mission, actually. The results of his first trip are in his darkroom, or so he told us."

"Then what's the problem?" I asked. "Go there and get it."

Two glassy stares came back at me.

"Don't tell me you didn't ask him for the address of the house he rented."

"Of course we did," said Bach. His annoyance made him seem almost human. "Here's the address he gave us."

He turned his notebook around on my desk and I glanced at it:

211 Buckley Avenue

Morristown, New Jersey

"Straightforward," I said. "What's the problem?"

"There is no Buckley Avenue in Morristown. No name remotely like it."

I raised my eyebrows. "You think he lied to you?"

"We're wondering if he may have used the rental money for his own purposes."

I thought about Tully. Like me, he sometimes had gambling debts. Like me, they were sometimes big ugly ones.

I shrugged. "Did anyone check with his usual film developers? If he didn't set up a darkroom—"

"We thought of that. The lab hasn't seen him in weeks, not

even to bring in his own film. No, he set up a darkroom somewhere. But where? A rented house? A friend's home?"

Alvarez leaned forward. "You knew the man, Mr. Crow. Can you help us?"

"Ah," I said.

"Ah? What does that mean?"

"You want my professional services. So like I said before, how much?"

Half an hour later we were in their car, heading southwest from Atlantic City. After much complaining the Feds had agreed that a reward would be in order if I could lead them to the film. That was as good an offer as I was likely to get, so I raised the question I had been waiting to ask.

"Did Tully write down this address the way you have it here?"

"No, he reported it over the phone. What difference does that make?"

I smiled. "Come on. Let's go earn my reward."

So now we were on our way, although the agents had their doubts. Alvarez was driving; but Bach turned around in his seat to look at me. "So Tully *did* tell you where he rented a house."

"Not a bit. But as you guys said, I knew the man. And

there's a basic flaw in your thinking."

"Which is?"

"Tully Rowson was a Piney, born and bred."

"A what?"

"A native of the Pine Barrens, here in South Jersey. He was born in Mount Holly. There's just no reason he would go up to Morris County when a hundred closer places would do as well."

"I don't follow," said Bach. "Morristown can't be more than two or three hours from Atlantic City. I commute almost that far to get to my office in Manhattan. This state is just so small."

"That's the point," I told him. "We think in terms of small distances. Look, ten years ago there was a movement to have South Jersey secede from the rest of the state. Tully Rowson was out with a picket sign, supporting the idea."

"Are you trying to convince us we hired a lunatic as our photographer, or is there a point to this?"

"I'm saying he wouldn't go to Morristown without a heck of a good reason."

"None of which explains why he lied to us," said Alvarez, "and why you're leading us out into the middle of nowhere."

"He didn't lie," I said. "Check the sign ahead."

Bach began to sputter. Alvarez pounded the dashboard with the heel of his hand.

"Welcome to Mauricetown," Bach recited. His voice was a croak. "Maw-reece-town?"

"Pronounced Morristown by the locals," I explained. "Named after the Maurice River, which is spelled—"

"Maw-reece," growled Bach. He was a poor sport.

"This is Cumberland County," I told them. "Pine Barrens country. Tully's home turf. Check any map, you'll see the Maurice River empties into Delaware Bay, over thataway. Lots of fish processors around here—"

"Cut the guided tour," said Bach. "You've made your point. And there's Buckley Avenue. Turn left."

Alvarez did and soon we were driving slowly past 211, a run-down house with a phony-looking anchor in the front yard. The house had a carport, and there was a big blue van sitting in it.

"I don't like that," said Alvarez.

"Neither do I," said Bach.

"You weren't expecting company?" I asked.

"That's not Rowson's car," said Bach.

"Maybe the people who killed him found out about the other Morristown," I suggested.

Alvarez looked at his partner. "Call for backup?"

"No time. You have your firearm?"

Feds. They couldn't say gun like a normal person.

"Wait a minute," I said. "I don't have any firearms."

"Stay in the car," said Bach. He unbuttoned his coat and loosened his holster.

I watched the two agents as they slowly moved toward the house. One was circling around to the back. I swore under my breath. If those two birds got themselves killed, I would lose my reward money, and that was the *best* thing that could happen. Worse, their bosses might try to blame it on me. Even worse, the Dotterman boys might come out and find me in the car.

I decided to do a little reconnoiter myself. I walked casually past the house—the Feds were out of sight now—and then moved back to the carport. I was ready to ease around the van when I heard a groan from inside.

I looked in through a side window. No one was visible.

The driver's door was unlocked, ready for a quick getaway. I opened it and peered cautiously into the van's interior.

Another groan.

A man was lying on the floor

of the van, his hands behind him, his face plaid with bruises. Both of his eyes were blackened.

"Tully?" I called, softly. "Is that you?"

"Hell, no," said Tully Rowson. His voice was hoarse and cracked. "I'm much better looking than this."

"Can you get up, pal?"

"No again. I'm handcuffed to this floor panel here." He jiggled his arms to demonstrate. "Marty? What the hell are you doing here?"

"Long story, Tull. Let's get you out first."

I scavenged around and found a tire iron someone had stored under the front seat.

I couldn't break the handcuffs without doing damage to Tully's hands, which were bleeding already. The floor panel was more pliable, and I snapped it.

"On your feet, Tully. Your chums may be back any second." The back doors were locked, so I had to coax him slowly through a front door, all the time expecting somebody to come out of the house, hoping it would be Bach and Alvarez, not Dotterman's boys.

"Come on, Tully. Move those feet."

I hustled him across the street and into the Feds' car. In the sunshine he looked even worse.

"Your ship floated back without you. Everybody thought you were dead."

"Yeah, well. They weren't far wrong." He coughed. "Got a drink? Even water would do."

"Sorry, pal."

"Well, let's get out of here then. Put this car in gear before those jokers find the film and come out."

I sighed. "No can do. This car belongs to two Feds, named Bach and Alvarez. They—"

"Those clowns. They're the ones who hired me. An easy job, they said. Real easy, the dirty—" He broke off in a fit of coughing.

"The guys who took you off your boat, Tully. Why did they torture you?"

"They wanted to know where I put the film."

I looked at him, amazed. "For pete's sake, why didn't you tell them?"

"I did, you idiot. First thing, before they laid a finger on me. But—get this, you won't believe it—they went to the wrong address."

I believed it. "They went to Morris County."

"Right. Way the heck north, in the *mountains*. Why would anyone go up there?"

"Anyway, when they didn't find anything, they came back to the yacht where they were holding me—and, hey, that was some nice ship. If the Feds are

gonna confiscate it—"

"Please, Tully."

"Oh, right. Right. Well, they came back, convinced I had lied to them. They beat the bilge out of me before I could find out how they screwed up."

"And this time they brought you along," I finished.

"Exactly. Say, what's keeping your G-men in there?"

As if to answer his question, there came the muffled sound of gunshots. "Oh, hell," I said. "Let's hope the good guys won."

They hadn't. Three men in bluejeans came running out the door to the carport. They jumped into their van and started the engine.

"Well, there goes the reward money," I said.

"Can't you do something, Marty?"

It was against my principles to risk human life for mere money. Especially *my* human life. And my gun was back in Atlantic City.

But maybe there was an easy way to do it. "Stay here, Tully."

I ran across the street and onto the lawn of the rented house. The carport was connected with a daylight basement, meaning that the front lawn was about eight feet higher than the driveway.

As the van backed up I grabbed hold of the decorative anchor on the lawn and pulled.

That baby was heavy. I took a deep breath and tried dragging the thing. I moved it slowly to the edge of the lawn where a cement wall kept the yard from falling into the driveway.

When the front of the van reached me I tipped the anchor over, said a silent prayer to the gods of adrenaline, and shoved.

It was enough. The van had that modern-looking slanted windshield the consumer magazines say is unsafe. As far as I know the magazines haven't pointed out that the tilted glass is easy to drop an anchor through. Maybe they should mention it.

The anchor smashed the shatterproof glass, bounced off the dashboard, and pinned the driver's leg to his seat. He started screaming and the other two pirates scrambled to get out.

That was when Alvarez stumbled out of the house, one hand pressed to his bleeding forehead and the other pointing a gun. Firearm. He was a mess, but he had the pirates under control.

Speaking of control, that's what I should have maintained over the anchor chain. I hadn't even noticed the damned thing had gotten wrapped around my

leg. When I dropped the anchor the chain went with it, and I went with the chain, hitting the driveway head first.

Man overboard.

I think we used every ambulance in Cumberland County. Bach had a bullet wound in the chest, but he lived to file more expense vouchers. Alvarez needed stitches in his forehead. Tully had multiple cuts and abrasions. The Dotterman driver had a broken leg and one of the other pirates had been hit in the eye with a flying piece of windshield. The anchor chain broke my ankle.

I rode in an ambulance with Tully. "That was some show," he told me. "You should have seen yourself flying through the air. Most fun I've had in years."

I started to complain about his ingratitude, but the ambulance hit a bump and I had to stop to wince. "Do me a favor, Tully. Give up the spy stuff and stick to fishing."

Rowson shook his head in wonderment. "All this foofaraw over a few rolls of film." He laughed. "Wouldn't it be a riot if I forgot to take the lens cap off?"

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Italian's Story

by Catherine  
Crowe



“How well your friend speaks English!” I remarked one day to an acquaintance when I was abroad, alluding to a gentleman who had just quitted the room. “What is his name?”

“Count Francesco Ferraldi.”

“I suppose he has been in England?”

“Oh, yes; he was exiled and taught Italian there. His history is very curious and would interest you, who like wonderful things.”

“Can you tell it me?”

“Not correctly; as I never heard it from himself. But I believe he has no objection to tell it—with the exception of the political transactions in which he was concerned, and which caused his being sent out of the Austrian dominions; that part of it, I believe, he thinks it not prudent to allude to. We’ll ask him to dinner, if you’ll meet him, and perhaps we may persuade him to tell the story.” Accordingly, the meeting took place; we dined *en petit comité*—and the count very goodnatureedly yielded to our request; “but you must excuse me,” he said, “beginning a long way back, for my story commences three hundred years ago.

“Our family claims to be of great antiquity, but we were not very wealthy till about the latter half of the tenth century, when Count Jacopo Ferraldi made very considerable additions to the property, not only getting but also by saving—he was, in fact, a miser. Before that period the Ferraldis had been warriors, and we could boast of many distinguished deeds of arms recorded in our annuals, but Jacopo, although by the death of his brother he ultimately inherited the title and estates, had begun life as a younger son and, being dissatisfied with his portion, had resolved to increase it by commerce.

“Florence then was a very different city to what it is now; trade flourished, and its merchants had correspondence and large dealings with all the chief cities of Europe. My ancestor invested his little fortune so judiciously, or so fortunately, that he trebled it in his first venture; and as people grow rapidly rich who gain and don’t spend, he soon had wealth to his heart’s content. But I am wrong in using that term as applied to him—he was never content with his gains but still worked to add to them, for he grew to love the money for itself and not for what it might purchase.

“At length, his two elder brothers died, and as they left no issue, he succeeded to their inheritance and dwelt in the palace of his ancestors, but instead of circulating his riches, he hoarded them;



and being too miserly to entertain his friends and neighbors, he lived like an anchorite in his splendid halls, exulting in his possessions but never enjoying them. His great pleasure and chief occupation seems to have been counting his money, which he kept hidden in strange out-of-the-way places or in strong iron chests clamped to the floors and walls. But, notwithstanding these precautions, and that he guarded it like a watchdog, to his great dismay he one day missed a sum of two thousand pounds which he had concealed in an ingeniously contrived receptacle under the floor of his dining room, the existence of which was only known to the man who made it; at least so he believed. Small as was this sum in proportion to what he possessed, the shock was tremendous; he rushed out of his house like a madman with the intention of dragging the criminal to justice, but when he arrived at the man's shop he found him in bed and at the point of death. His friends and the doctor swore that he had not quitted it for a fortnight; in short, according to their showing, he was taken ill on his return from working at the count's the very day he finished the job.

"If this were true, he could not be the thief, as the money was not deposited there till some days afterwards, and although the count had his doubts, it was not easy to disprove what everybody swore, more especially as the man died on the following day and was buried. Baffled and furious, he next fell foul of his two servants—he kept but two, for he only inhabited a small part of the palace. There was not the smallest reason to suspect them, nor to suppose they knew anything of the hiding place, for every precaution had been used to conceal it; moreover, he had found it locked as he himself had locked it after depositing the money, and he was quite sure the key had never been absent from his own person. Nevertheless, he discharged them and took no others. The thief, whoever he was, had evinced so much ingenuity that he trembled to think what such skill might compass with opportunity. So he resolved to afford none and henceforth to have his meals sent in from a neighboring eating house, and to have a person once a week to sweep and clean his rooms whom he could keep an eye on while it was doing. As he had no clue to the perpetrators of the robbery, and the man whom he had most reason to suspect was dead, he took no further steps in the business but kept it quiet lest he should draw too much attention towards his secret hoards; nevertheless, though externally calm, the loss preyed on his mind and caused him great anguish.

"Shortly after this occurrence, he received a letter from a sister of his who had several years before married an Englishman, saying that her husband was dead and, it being advisable that her dear and only son should enter into commerce, that she was going to send him to Florence, feeling assured that her brother would advise him for the best and enable him to employ the funds he brought with him advantageously.

"This was not pleasing intelligence; he did not want to promote anybody's interest but his own, and he felt that the young man would be a spy on his actions, an intruder in his house, and no doubt an expectant and greedy heir, counting the hours till he died; for this sister and her family were his nearest of kin, and would inherit if he left no will to the contrary. However, his arrival could not be prevented; letters traveled slowly in those days, and ere his could reach England his nephew would have quitted it, so he resolved to give him a cold reception and send him back as soon as he could.

"In the meantime, the young man had started on his journey, full of hope and confidence, and immediately on his arrival hastened to present himself to this rich uncle who was to show him the path he had himself followed to fortune. It was not for his own sake alone he coveted riches, but his mother and sister were but poorly provided for, and they had collected the whole of their little and risked it upon this venture, hoping, with the aid of their relative, to be amply repaid for the present sacrifice.

"A fine open-countenanced lad was Arthur Allen, just twenty years of age; such a face and figure had not beamed on those halls for many a day. Well brought up and well instructed too, he spoke Italian as well as English, his mother having accustomed him to it from infancy.

"Though he had heard his uncle was a miser, he had no conception of the extent to which the mania had arisen; and his joyous anticipations were somewhat damped when he found himself so coldly received, and when he looked into those hard, grey eyes and contracted features that had never expanded with a genial smile; so, fearing the old man might be apprehensive that he had come as an applicant or for assistance to set him up in trade, he hastened to inform him of the true state of the case, saying that they had got together two thousand pounds.

"'Of course, my mother,' he said, 'would not have entrusted my inexperience with such a sum; but she desired me to place it in

your hands, and to act entirely under your direction.'

"To use the miser's own expression—for we have learnt all these particulars from a memoir left by himself—'When I heard these words the devil entered into me, and I bade the youth bring the money and dine with me on the following day.'

"I daresay you will think the devil had entered into him long before; however, now he had recognized his presence, but that did not deter him from following his counsel.

"Pleased that he had so far thawed his uncle's frigidity, Arthur arrived the next day with his moneybags at the appointed hour, and was received in an inner chamber; their contents were inspected and counted, and then placed in one of the old man's iron chests. Soon afterwards, the tinkle of a bell announced that the waiter from the neighboring traiteur's had brought the dinner, and the host left the room to see that all was ready. Presently he re-entered and led his guest to the table. The repast was not sumptuous, but there was a bottle of old Lachryma Christi which he much recommended, and which the youth tasted with great satisfaction. But strange! He had no sooner swallowed the first glass than his eyes began to stare—there was a gurgle in his throat—a convulsion passed over his face—and his body stiffened.

"'I did not look up,' says the old man in his memoir, 'for I did not like to see the face of the boy that had sat down so hearty to his dinner, so I kept on eating mine—but I heard the gurgle, and I knew what had happened; and presently, lest the servant should come to fetch the dinner things, I pushed the table aside and opened the receptacle from which my two thousand pounds had been stolen—curses on the thief!—and I laid the body in it, and the wine therewith. I locked it and drove in two strong nails. Then I put back the table—moved away the lad's chair and plate, unlocked the door which was fast, and sat down to finish my dinner. I could not help chuckling as I ate to think how his had been spoilt.

"'I closed up that apartment, as I thought there might be a smell that would raise observation, and I selected one on the opposite side of the gallery for my dining room. All went well until the following day. I counted my two thousand pounds again and again, and I kept gloating over the recovery of it—for I felt as if it was my own money, and I had a right to seize it where I could. I wrote also to my sister, saying that her son had not arrived; but that when he did I would do my best to forward his views. My heart was light that day—they say that's a bad sign.

"Yes, all was so far well; but the next day we were two of us at dinner! And yet I had invited no guest; and the next—and the next—and so on—always! As I was about to sit down, he entered and took a chair opposite me, an unbidden guest. I ceased dining at home, but it made no difference; he came, dine where I would. This preyed upon me; I tried not to mind, but I could not help it. Argument was vain. I lost my appetite, and was reduced nearly to death's door. At last, driven to desperation, I consulted Fra Giuseppe. He had been a fast fellow in his time, and it was said had been too impatient for his father's succession; howbeit, the old man died suddenly; Giuseppe spent the money and then took to religion. I thought he was a proper person to consult, so I told him my case. He recommended repentance and restitution. I tried, but I could not repent, for I had got the money; but I thought, perhaps, if I parted with it to another, I might be released; so I looked about for an advantageous purchase, and hearing that Bartolomeo Malfi was in difficulties, I offered him two thousand pounds, money down for his land—I knew it was worth three times the sum. We signed the agreement, and then I went home and opened the door of the room where it was; but lo! he sat there upon the chest where the money was fast locked, and I could not get it. I peeped in two or three times, but he was always there; so I was obliged to expend other moneys in this purchase, which vexed me, albeit the bargain was a good one. Then I consulted friend Giuseppe again, and he said nothing would do but restitution—but that was bad, so I waited; and I said to myself, "I'll eat and care not whether he sit there or no." But, woe be to him! He chilled the marrow of my bones, and I could not away with him; so I said one day, "What if I go to England with the money?" And he bowed his head.'

"The old man accordingly took the moneybags from the chest and started for England. His sister and her daughter were still living in the house they had inhabited during the husband's lifetime; in short, it was their own; and being attached to the place, they hoped, if the young man succeeded in his undertakings, to be able to keep it. It was a small house with a garden full of flowers which the ladies cultivated themselves. The village church was close at hand, and the churchyard adjoined the garden. The poor ladies had become very uneasy at not hearing of Arthur's arrival; and when the old man presented himself and declared he had never seen anything of him, great was their affliction and dismay; for it was clear that some misfortune had happened to the boy, or he had

appropriated the money and gone off in some other direction. They scarcely admitted the possibility of the last contingency, although it was the one their little world universally adopted, in spite of his being a very well conducted and affectionate youth; but people said it was too great a temptation for his years, and blamed his mother for entrusting him with so much money. Whichever it was, the blow fell very heavy on them in all ways, for Arthur was their sole stay and support, and they loved him dearly.

"Since he had set out on this journey, the old man had been relieved from the company of his terrible guest, and was beginning to recover himself a little, but it occasioned him a severe pang when he remembered that this immunity was to be purchased with the sacrifice of two thousand pounds, and he set himself to think how he could jockey the ghost. But while he was deliberating on this subject, an event happened that alarmed him for the immediate safety of the money.

"He had found, on the road, that the great weight of a certain chest he brought with him had excited observation whenever his luggage had to be moved; on his arrival two laboring men had been called in to carry it into the house, and he had overheard some remarks that induced him to think they had drawn a right conclusion with regard to its contents. Subsequently, he saw these two men hovering about the house in a suspicious manner, and he was afraid to leave it or go to sleep at night, lest he should be robbed.

"So far we learn from Jacopo Ferraldi himself; but here the memoir stops and tradition says that he was found one morning murdered in his bed and his chest rifled. All the family, that is, the mother and daughter and their one servant, were accused of the murder, and notwithstanding their protestation of innocence were declared guilty and executed.

"The memoir I have quoted was found on his dressing table, and he appears to have been writing it when he was surprised by the assassins; for the last words were 'I think I've balked them, and nobody will understand the—'; then comes a large blot and a mark, as if the pen had fallen out of his hand. It seems wonderful that this man, so suspicious and secretive, should thus have entrusted to paper what it was needful he should conceal; but the case is not singular; it has been remarked in similar instances, when some mystery is pressing on a human soul, that there exists an irresistible desire to communicate it, notwithstanding the peril of betrayal; and when no other confidant can be found, the miserable

wretch has often had recourse to paper.

"The family of Arthur Allen being now extinct, a cousin of Jacopo's who was a penniless soldier succeeded to the title and estate, and the memoir, with a full account of what had happened, being forwarded to Italy, inquiries were made about the missing two thousand pounds; but it was not forthcoming; and it was at first supposed that the ladies had some accomplice who had carried it off. Subsequently, however, one of the two men who had borne the money chest into the house, at the period of the old man's arrival, was detected in endeavoring to dispose of some Italian gold and a diamond ring which Jacopo was in the habit of wearing. This led to investigation, and he ultimately confessed to the murder committed by himself and his companion, thus exonerating the unfortunate women. He nevertheless declared that they had not rifled the strongbox, as they could not open it and were disturbed by the barking of a dog before they could search for the keys. The box itself they were afraid to carry away, it being a remarkable one and liable to attract notice; and therefore their only booty was some loose coin and some jewels that were found on the old man's person. But this was not believed, especially as his accomplice could not be found and appeared, on inquiry, to have left that part of the country immediately after the catastrophe.

"There the matter rested for nearly two centuries and a half. Nobody sorrowed for Jacopo Ferraldi, and the fate of the Allens was a matter of indifference to the public, who were glad to see the estate fall into the hands of his successor, who appears to have made a much better use of his riches. The family, in the long period that elapsed, had many vicissitudes; but at the period of my birth my father inhabited the same old palace, and we were in tolerably affluent circumstances. I was born there, and I remember as a child the curiosity I used to feel about the room with the secret receptacle under the floor where Jacopo had buried the body of his guest. It had been found there and had received Christian burial; but the receptacle still remained and the room was shut up, being said to be haunted. I never *saw* anything extraordinary, but I can bear witness to the frightful groans and moans that issued from it sometimes at night, when, if I could persuade anybody to accompany me, I used to stand in the gallery and listen with wonder and awe. But I never passed the door alone, nor would any of the servants do so after dark. There had been an attempt made to exclude the sounds by walling up the door; but so far from this succeeding,

they became twenty times worse, and as the wall was a disfigurement as well as a failure, the unquiet spirit was placated by taking it down again.

"The old man's memoir is always preserved among the family papers, and his picture still hangs in the gallery. Many strangers who have heard something of this extraordinary story have asked to see it. The palace is now inhabited by an Austrian nobleman. Whether the ghost continues to annoy the inmates by his lamentations, I do not know.

"I now," said Count Francesco, "come to my personal history. Political reasons a few years since obliged me to quit Italy with my family. I had no resources except a little ready money that I had brought with me, and I had resolved to utilize some musical talent which I had cultivated for my amusement. I had not voice enough to sing in public, but I was capable of giving lessons and was considered, when in Italy, a successful amateur. I will not weary you with the sad details of my early residence in England; you can imagine the difficulties that an unfortunate foreigner must encounter before he can establish a connection: Suffice it to say that my small means were wholly exhausted, and very often I, and what was worse my wife and child, were in want of bread, and indebted to one of my own prosperous countrymen for the very necessities of life. I was almost in despair, and I do not know what rash thing I might have done if I was a single man; but I had my family depending on me, and it was my duty not to sink under my difficulties however great they were.

"One night I had been singing at the house of a nobleman in St. James's Square and had received some flattering compliments from a young man who appeared to be very fond of Italian music, and to understand it. My getting to this party was a stroke of good luck in the first instance, for I was quite unknown to the host, but Signor A., an acquaintance of mine, who had been engaged for the occasion, was taken ill at the last moment, and had sent me with a note of introduction to apply for his place.

"I knew, of course, that I should be well paid for my services, but I would gladly have accepted half the sum I expected if I could have had it that night, for our little treasury was wholly exhausted, and we had not sixpence to purchase a breakfast for the following day. When the great hall door shut upon me, and I found myself on the pavement, with all that luxury and splendor on one side and I and my desolation on the other, the contrast struck me cruelly,



for I too had been rich, and dwelt in illuminated palaces, and had a train of liveried servants to my command, and sweet music had echoed through my halls. I felt desperate, and drawing my hat over my eyes I began pacing the square, forming wild plans for the relief or escape from my misery. No doubt I looked frantic, for you know we Italians have such a habit of gesticulating that I believe my thoughts were accompanied by movements that must have excited notice; but I was too much absorbed to observe anything till I was roused by a voice saying, 'Signor Ferraldi, still here this damp chilly night! Are you not afraid for your voice—it is worth taking care of.'

"To what purpose," I said savagely. 'It will not give me bread!'

"If the interruption had not been so sudden, I should not have made such an answer, but I was surprised into it before I knew who had addressed me. When I looked up I saw it was the young man I had met at Lord L.'s who had complimented me on my singing. I took off my hat and begged his pardon, and was about to move away when he took my arm.

"Excuse me," he said, 'let us walk together,' and then after a little pause, he added, with an apology, 'I think you are an exile.'

"I am," I said.

"And I think," he continued, 'I have surprised you out of a secret that you would not voluntarily have told me. I know well the hardships that beset many of your countrymen—as good gentlemen as we are ourselves—when you are obliged to leave your country; and I beg therefore you will not think me impertinent or intrusive if I beg you to be frank with me and tell me how you are situated.'

"This offer of sympathy was evidently so sincere, and it was so welcome at such a moment, that I did not hesitate to comply with my new friend's request—I told him everything—adding that in time I hoped to get known, and that then I did not fear being able to make my way; but that meanwhile we were in danger of starving.

"During this conversation we were walking round and round the square, where in fact he lived. Before we parted at his door, he had persuaded me to accept of a gift I call it, for he had then no reason to suppose I should ever be able to repay him, but he called it an advance of ten guineas upon some lessons I was to give him; the first installment of which was to be paid the following day.

"I went home with a comparatively light heart, and the next morning waited upon my friendly pupil, whom I found, as I expected, a very promising scholar. He told me with a charming

frankness that he had not much influence in fashionable society, for his family, though rich, was *parvenue*, but he said he had two sisters, as fond of music as himself, who would be shortly in London and would be delighted to take lessons, as I had just the voice they liked to sing with them.

"This was the first auspicious incident that had occurred to me, nor did the omen fail in its fulfillment. I received great kindness from the family when they came to London. I gave them lessons, sang at their parties, and they took every opportunity of recommending me to their friends.

"When the end of the season approached, however, I felt somewhat about the future—there would be no parties to sing at, and my pupils would all be leaving town; but my new friends, whose name, by the way, was Greathead, had a plan for me in their heads which they strongly recommended me to follow. They said they had a house in the country with a large neighborhood—in fact near a large watering place; and if I went there during the summer months, they did not doubt my getting plenty of teaching, adding, 'We are much greater people there than we are here, you see; and our recommendation will go a great way.'

"I followed my friends' advice, and soon after they left London I joined them at Salton, which was the name of their place. As I had left my wife and children in town, with very little money, I was anxious that they should join me as soon as possible; and therefore, the morning after my arrival, I proceeded to look for a lodging at S., and to take measures to make my object known to the residents and visitors there. My business done, I sent my family directions for their journey and then returned to Salton to spend a few days, as I had promised my kind patrons:

"The house was modern; in fact, it had been built by Mr. Greathead's grandfather, who was the architect of their fortunes; the grounds were extensive, and the windows looked on a fine lawn, a picturesque ruin, a sparkling rivulet, and a charming flower garden; there could not be a prettier view than we enjoyed while sitting at breakfast. It was my first experience of the lovely and graceful English homes, and it fully realized all my expectations, both within doors and without. After breakfast Mr. Greathead and his son asked me to accompany them round the grounds, as they were contemplating some alterations.

"'Among other things,' said Mr. G., 'we want to turn this rivulet; but my wife has a peculiar fancy for that old hedge, which is exactly

in the way, and she won't let me root it up.'

'The hedge alluded to enclosed two sides of the flower garden but seemed out of place, I thought.

'Why?' said I. 'What is Mrs. Greathead's attachment to the hedge?'

'Why? It's very old; it formerly bordered the churchyard, for that old ruin you see there is all that remains of the parish church; and this flower garden, I fancy, is all the more brilliant for the rich soil of the burial ground. But what is remarkable is that the hedge and that side of the garden are full of Italian flowers, and always have been so as long as anybody can remember. Nobody knows how it happens, but they must spring up from some old seeds that have been long in the ground. Look at this cyclamen growing wild in the hedge.'

'The subject of the alterations was renewed at dinner, and Mrs. Greathead still objecting to the removal of the hedge, her younger son, whose name was Harry, said, 'It is very well for Mamma to pretend it is for the sake of the flowers, but I am quite sure that the real reason is that she is afraid of offending the ghost.'

'What nonsense, Harry,' she said. 'You must not believe him, Mr. Ferraldi.'

'Well, Mamma,' said the boy, 'you know you will never be convinced that that was not a ghost you saw.'

'Never mind what it was,' she said; 'I won't have the hedge removed.' Presently, she added, 'I suppose you would laugh at anyone's believing in a ghost, Mr. Ferraldi.'

'Quite the contrary,' I answered; 'I believe in them myself, and upon very good grounds, for we have a celebrated ghost in our family.'

'Well,' she said, 'Mr. Greathead and the boys laugh at me; but when I came to live here, upon the death of Mr. Greathead's grandfather—for his father never inhabited the place, having died by an accident before the old gentleman—I never heard a word of the place being haunted; and, perhaps, I should not have believed it if I had. But one evening, when the younger children were gone to bed, and Mr. Greathead and George were sitting with some friends in the dining room, I and my sister, who was staying with me, strolled into the garden. It was the month of August, and a bright starlight night. We were talking on a very interesting matter, for my sister had that day received an offer from the gentleman she afterwards married. I mention this to show you that we were

not thinking of anything supernatural but, on the contrary, that our minds were quite absorbed with the subject we were discussing. I was looking on the ground, as one often does when listening intently to what another person is saying; my sister was speaking, when she suddenly stopped and laid her hand upon my arm, saying, "Who's that?"

"I raised my eyes and saw, not many yards from us, an old man, withered and thin, dressed in a curious antique fashion, with a high-peaked hat on his head. I could not conceive who he could be, or what he could be doing there, for it was close to the flower garden; so we stood still to observe him. I don't know whether you saw the remains of an old tombstone in a corner of the garden? It is said to be that of a former rector of the parish; the date, 1550, is still legible upon it. The old man walked from one side of the hedge to that stone, and seemed to be counting his steps. He walked like a person pacing the ground, to measure it; then he stopped and appeared to be noting the result of his measurement with a pencil and paper he held in his hand; then he did the same thing the other side of the hedge, pacing up to the old tombstone and back.

"There was a talk, at that time, of removing the hedge, and digging up the old tombstone; and it occurred to me that my husband might have been speaking to somebody about it, and that this man might be concerned in the business, though still his dress and appearance puzzled me. It seemed odd, too, that he took no notice of us; and I might have remarked that we heard no footsteps, though we were quite close enough to do so; but these circumstances did not strike me then. However, I was just going to advance and ask him what he was doing when I felt my sister's hand release the hold she had of my arm, and she sank to the ground; at the same instant I lost sight of the mysterious old man, who suddenly disappeared.

"My sister had not fainted; but she said her knees bent under her and she had slipped down, collapsed by terror. I did not feel very comfortable myself, I assure you; but I lifted her up, and we hastened back to the house and told what we had seen. The gentlemen went out and, of course, saw nothing, and laughed at us; but shortly afterwards, when Harry was born, I had a nurse from the village, and she asked me one day if I had ever happened to see "the old gentleman that walks." I had ceased to think of the circumstance, and inquired what old gentleman she meant. And then she told me that long ago, a foreign gentleman had been murdered

here; that is, in the old house that Mr. Greathead's grandfather pulled down when he built this; and that ever since the place has been haunted, and that nobody will pass by the hedge and the old tombstone after dark, for that is the spot to which the ghost confines himself.'

" 'But I should think,' said I, 'that so far from desiring to preserve these objects, you would rather wish them removed, since the ghost would, probably, cease to visit the spot at all.'

" 'Quite the contrary,' answered Mr. G. 'The people of the neighborhood say that the former possessor of the place entertained the same idea and had resolved to move them; but that then the old man became very troublesome and was even seen in the house; the nurse positively assured me that her mother had told her old Mr. Greathead had also intended to remove them, but that he quite suddenly counter-ordered the directions he had given and, though he did not confess to anything of the sort, the people all believed that he had seen the ghost. Certain it is, that this hedge has always been maintained by the proprietors of the place.'

"The young men laughed and quizzed their mother for indulging in such superstitions; but the lady was quite firm in her opposition, alleging that, independently of all considerations connected with the ghost, she liked the hedge on account of the Italian flowers; and she liked the old tombstone on account of its antiquity.

"Consequently, some other plan was devised for Mr. Greathead's alterations, which led the course of the rivulet quite clear of the hedge and the tombstone.

"In a few days my family arrived, and I established myself at S. for the summer. The speculation answered very well, and through the recommendations of Mr. and Mrs. Greathead, and their personal kindness to myself and my wife, we passed the time very pleasantly. When the period of our returning to London approached, they invited us to spend a fortnight with them before our departure, and accordingly, the day we gave up our lodgings, we removed to Salton.

"Preparations for turning the rivulet had then commenced, and soon after my arrival, I walked out with Mr. Greathead to see the works. There was a boy, about fourteen, amongst the laborers; and while we were standing close to him, he picked up something and handed it to Mr. G., saying, 'Is this yours, sir?', which, on examination, proved to be a gold coin of the sixteenth century—the date on it was 1545. Presently the boy, who was digging, picked up

another; and then several more.

"'This becomes interesting,' said Mr. Greathead. 'I think we are coming upon some buried treasure'; and he whispered to me that he had better not leave the spot.

"Accordingly, he did stay till it was time to dress for dinner; and feeling interested, I remained also. In the interval, many more coins were found, and when he went in, he dismissed the workmen and sent a servant to watch the place—for he saw by their faces that if he had not happened to be present, he would probably never have heard of the circumstance. A few more turned up the following day, and then the store seemed exhausted. When the villagers heard of this money's being discovered, they all looked upon it as the explanation of the old gentleman's haunting that particular spot. No doubt he had buried the money, and it remained to be seen whether, now that it was found, his spirit would be at rest.

"My two children were with me at Salton on this occasion. They slept in a room on the third floor, and one morning, my wife having told me that the younger of the two seemed unwell, I went upstairs to look at her. It was a cheerful room, with two little white beds in it and several old prints and samplers and bits of work such as you see in nurseries framed and hung against the wall. After I had spoken to the child, and while my wife was talking to the maid, I stood with my hands in my pockets, idly looking at these things. Among them was one that arrested my attention because at first I could not understand it, nor see why this discolored parchment, with a few lines and dots on it, should have been framed and glazed. There were some words here and there which I could not decipher, so I lifted the frame off the nail and carried it to the window. Then I saw that the words were Italian, written in a crabbed, old fashioned hand, and the whole seemed to be a plan or sketch, rudely drawn, of what I thought at first was a camp—but, on closer examination, I saw was part of a churchyard with tombstones, from one of which various lines were drawn to various dots, and among these lines were numbers; and here and there a word, as *right*, *left*, etc. There were also two lines forming a right angle which intersected the whole, and after contemplating the thing for some time, it struck me that it was a rude sort of map of the old churchyard and the hedge which had formed the subject of conversation some days before.

"At breakfast I mentioned what I had observed to Mr. and Mrs. Greathead, and they said they believed it was; it had been found

when the old house was pulled down, and was kept on account of antiquity.

"Of what period is it?" I asked. "And how happens it to have been made by an Italian?"

"The last question I can't answer," said Mr. Greathead, "but the date is on it, I believe."

"No," said I, "I examined it particularly—there is no date."

"Oh, there is a date and name, I think—but I never examined it myself." And to settle the question he desired his son Harry to run up and fetch it, adding, "You know, Italian architects and designers of various kinds were not rare in this country a few centuries ago."

"Harry brought the frame, and we were confirmed in our conjectures of what it represented, but we could find no date or name."

"And yet I think I've heard there was one," said Mr. Greathead. "Let us take it out of the frame."

"This was easily done, and we found the date and the name."

The count paused, and then added:

"I dare say you can guess it?"

"Jacopo Ferraldi?" I said.

"It was," he answered; "and it immediately occurred to me that he had buried the money supposed to have been stolen on the night he was murdered, and that this was the plan to guide him to finding it again. So I told Mr. Greathead the story I have now told you, and mentioned my reasons for supposing that if I was correct in my surmise, more gold would be found."

"With the old man's map as our guide, we immediately set to work—the whole family vigorously joining in the search; and, as I expected, we found that the tombstone in the garden was the point from which all the lines were drawn, and that the dots indicated where the money lay. It was in different heaps, and appeared to have been enclosed in bags, which had rotted away with time. We found the whole sum mentioned in the memoir, and Mr. Greathead, being lord of the manor, was generous enough to make it all over to me, as being the lawful heir, which, however, I certainly was not, for it was the spoil of a murderer and thief and it properly belonged to the Allens. But that family had become extinct; at least so we believed, when the two unfortunate ladies were executed, and I accepted the gift with much gratitude and a quiet conscience. It relieved us from our pressing difficulties and enabled me to wait for better times."



"And," said I, "now of the ghost? Was he pleased or otherwise by the *dénouement*?"

"I cannot say," replied the count; "I have not heard of his being seen since; I believe, however, that the villagers, who understand these things better than we do, say that they should not be surprised if he allowed the hedge and tombstone to be removed now without opposition; but Mr. Greathead, on the contrary, wished to retain them as mementos of these curious circumstances."

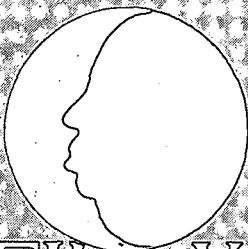
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### **SOLUTION TO THE APRIL "UNSOLVED":**

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The Turkish chess set, for which Ms. Sparks says the museum paid a fortune, is not Turkish. Turkish and Arabic chess sets—especially in the time of the Crusades, but even today—admitted no women onto their chess boards, so there would be no queens. (They use the vizier for that piece.) Also, there certainly would be no bishops. (These are represented on the Saracenic board by elephants.) It may indeed have come from Venice. The Fourth Crusade set out from there in 1198 under the eighty-year-old, partially blind doge, Enrico Dandolo; and ended up plundering its own eastern allies. But the chess set that came back with the loot was Christian.

Richard the Lion-Heart, incidentally, could well have used the bathtub—if it was in Trifels castle in 1193-94. Although the upper classes of his day vigorously eschewed bathing, the Crusaders learned of its benefits from the infidels, and had taken up the practice, along with chess, quite enthusiastically.



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by Carol Harper

## the SERPENT AMONGST the LILIES

528 An Investigation into the Mysterious Woman known as The Maid, Jeanne D'Arc, by a loyal servant to the English Throne, Matthew Judson.

P.C. DOHERTY

**P** C. Doherty, whose doctorate in history from Oxford has led him to interweave real events and real unsolved "crimes" into mystery fiction, has joined Ellis Peters in the writing of medieval mysteries.

Doherty has written seven novels (all published by St. Martin's Press in hardcover, several also now available in paperback), four of which feature Hugh Corbett, Edward I's faithful clerk, who is supervised in his investigations, at least in the earlier books, by Robert Burnell, King Edward's chancellor and Bishop of Bath and Wells. Like all of Doherty's investigators, Corbett has few ties ("no wife, no child") and has "reached his thirty-eighth year still enjoying robust health in

an age when a man was lucky to pass his thirty-fifth." While he profits as senior clerk in the chancery, reporting directly to the king, and in ownership of property and two bank accounts, he is not comfortable in the assignments he is given.

The Corbett series, set in the thirteenth century, includes *Satan in St. Mary's* (1987), *The Crown in Darkness* (1988), *Spy in Chancery* (1988), and *Angel of Death* (1990), and deals primarily with matters of state. The first, *Satan in St. Mary's*, introduces Corbett in his new job of clerk. The king wants Hugh to investigate a possible assassination plot. The story, which takes place in 1284, involves a suicide in Hugh's neighborhood church, St. Mary Le Bow; a Satanic cult that is

headquartered there; and Simon de Montfort, one of Edward's primary enemies. The suicide, cult, and assassination plot were all actual events; only Hugh's investigation is fiction.

*The Crown in Darkness* has Hugh sent to Scotland by Burnell, without Edward's knowledge, to investigate the sudden death of Alexander III, king of Scotland. Alexander died on a stormy night during a wild ride to the side of his new wife Yolanda, a French princess. Both Burnell and Bishop Wishart, Chancellor of Scotland, suspect murder, and Hugh is to find out if, indeed, murder was done, how, and by whom.

*Spy in Chancery* is built around the true story of a traitor in the English court, who, in 1296, "was successfully managed by the French and was able to send information to them about the secret plans of the English king."

*Angel of Death* is concerned with another actual event—the sack of Berwick in 1298, following a great assembly of the realm in 1297, where Walter de Montfort, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, who had been appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to argue vehemently against the king's right to tax the church, died mysteriously in full view of the assembly. Because De Montfort was poisoned during the con-

secration of the wine prior to the delivery of his sermon, suspicion for the murder falls both on the king, who would wish any member of the De Montfort family dead, and the five priests who assisted in the Mass.

The remaining three of Doherty's novels do not include Corbett and occur later in the Middle Ages. In Doherty's fourteenth century mystery, *The Death of a King* (1986), the then king of England, Edward III, wants to know if Edward II was murdered. History states that he was imprisoned at Berkely Castle, and subsequently was cruelly and gruesomely killed by Guernei, Ockel, and John Maltravers, the latter having been entrusted with the king's custody. Doherty's story begins some seventeen years after this death. Edmund Beche, a very junior royal clerk who, like Corbett, has no living relatives or close friends, is assigned to investigate the murder. He is to be supervised by John Stratford, Archbishop of Canterbury. The assignment seems to him to be a no-win situation. While he is told he has *carte blanche*, he begins to get the impression that he is being subtly guided to a predetermined decision. After all, who would miss him if he disappeared? In order to safeguard his actual discoveries, therefore, he tells the tale of his travels from Lon-

don to Italy in a series of thirteen letters dated between August, 1345, and February, 1347, to a former classmate from Oxford, Richard Bliton, Prior of Croyland Abbey.

The relationship of highly placed clergy such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and Adam Orleton (Bishop of Hereford and later of Worcester) to the king of England, and the prominence of the church in everyday English life is of special interest to this story. For example, the archives at St. Paul's Cathedral, including contemporary annals of events occurring during Edward II's reign, are described as a valuable history. A witness to the murder, a former monk, tells how he became a Dominican, not because he had a vocation for the priesthood but because monks lived a clean, relatively comfortable life. A brief but pertinent description of life at the Franciscan "Monastery of St. Albert" at Butrio, Italy, concludes the letters of Edmund Beche.

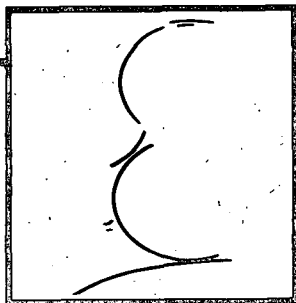
Doherty's sixth and seventh mystery novels, *The Whyte Harte* (1988) and *The Serpent Amongst the Lilies* (1990), are set in the fifteenth century, and feature narratives by Matthew Jankyn, ex-scholar, liar, mercenary soldier, and thief, but, in Jankyn's own words, above all else a liar. It appears we are

in for a series of memoirs by Jankyn. In *The Whyte Harte*, Jankyn tells the tale of the death of Richard II, the events leading up to that death, and the mystery enshrouding it. Of course Jankyn is a liar. But perhaps "not too much of a liar." Jankyn's narrative relates his own past, a past spent unwillingly under the tutelage of priests and friars in an Augustinian monastery; his rebellious flirtation with the heresy of Lollardism; and finally his becoming a thief, an accused traitor, and yeoman to Bishop Henry Beaufort. It is Beaufort who "rescues" Jankyn from Newgate Prison to serve as his investigator of the rumors that Richard II is not dead, but alive in Scotland, encouraging the small rebellions under the sign of the White Hart.

*The Serpent Amongst the Lilies* sets Jankyn (the serpent) among the followers of Jeanne d'Arc (the lilies) at the behest of Beaufort. Beaufort wants to know if Jeanne is really a saint, and how to get to her so that the war against the British can be foiled. Jankyn comes to like Jeanne and resent being pitted against her. And, somehow, Jeanne acts as if she knows that Jankyn is a spy. A twist in the story of the trial and execution of Jeanne finishes this book off nicely.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**T**he Middle East, with its bazaars, minarets, harsh desert, and ancient cultures has always been a mysterious place to outsiders. When Alfred Hitchcock decided to remake *The Man Who Knew Too Much* in 1958, he chose to begin his new version in a congested and dusty urban landscape in Morocco. He then took his characters back to London, a more familiar terrain for him and his audience.

*Not Without My Daughter*, the latest cinematic Middle East thriller, starts out in familiar terrain and winds up in the highly charged, chaotic capital city of Iran. It's the true story of Betty Mahmoody, a Michigan woman married to an Iranian doctor who, after twenty years in America, decides he must take his wife and little daughter to visit relatives in Iran. He also wants to see the

Islamic Revolution at first hand.

The story is nicely established by scenes of the idyllic life Betty shares with her husband Moody and their adorable, thoroughly American daughter, Mahtob. They live in a lovely lakeside suburban home, where they can listen to the birds chirp, lounge on their patio, or fish from their private dock. They quench their mid-day thirsts with Betty's homemade lemonade. Nothing ever goes wrong. Well, Moody does complain that the lemonade is too sour.

But soon his complaints grow. It's been too long since he's visited his family in Iran. His medical colleagues show him no respect.

Finally, he asks his wife to agree to a family visit. "I swear to you," he tells her, "you won't be in any danger. We'll be back in two weeks."



Although Mrs. Mahmoody, played by Sally Field, is aware of the dangers of visiting a country at war (with Iraq) and still in the midst of tremendous social upheaval, she eventually goes along with her husband's wishes.

Once they leave their middle-America oasis for tumultuous Tehran, however, things rapidly change. Betty, now the outsider, probably wished she had put more sugar in the lemonade.

Upon their arrival, the Michiganders are immediately set upon by Moody's extended family, which includes black-clad women who whoop with joy (or horror) at seeing their American relative. They present Betty with a chador—an Islamic head covering that women must wear—as a gift.

Following heated exchanges with his Iranian kin, Moody concludes that he and his wife and daughter would be better off in Iran than in Michigan.

"We are not going back," he tells Betty. "I want us to live in Iran. I want Mahtob to grow up here. I want her to be a Muslim."

"We can't stay here," his hysterical wife cries. "This is a backward, primitive country." Moody hits her—something he has never done before—and from then on, the audience knows the action will focus on Betty's

attempts to escape with her daughter.

Sally Field, as Betty, shows the range of emotions filmgoers are used to from her. She's strong and vulnerable, caring and hateful. And in an instant, she can switch from one to the other.

Alfred Molina, as Moody, does his best work during the scenes set in his homeland. In the Michigan scenes, he is flat and shows no emotion. A stronger actor would have made the improbable visit to wartorn Iran more plausible. He comes across as a whiny loser.

Sheila Rosenthal, the five-year-old who plays Mahtob, is quite simply adorable.

Although ostensibly set in Tehran, much of *Not Without My Daughter* was filmed in Israel. The setting is quite believable, however. Posters, paintings, and banners of Ayatollah Khomeini dominate the view. Scores of loudspeakers regularly broadcast prayer. Gun-toting soldiers and police are everywhere. On the other hand, short shrift is given to Betty and Mahtob's harrowing journey across a moonscaped countryside into Turkey.

While *Not Without My Daughter* is an interesting story, the film version has a slight feeling. It's entertaining, Sally Field is good, but it fails to get the adrenaline flowing much.



# THE STORY THAT WON

The Mid-December Mysterious Pat Popelier of East Moline, Ill. to Alfred W. Cross of Sacra-Pariseau of Owosso, Michigan; Washington; Cynthia Settle of of Rexdale, Ontario, Canada; Mary Ellen Kimsey of Pueblo, Colorado; Randall J. Covill of Atkinson, New Hampshire; David Bart of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Elizabeth W. Vinyard of Placentia, California; and E. Beachy of Dayton, Ohio.



Photograph contest was won by linois. Honorable mentions go mento, California; Perry E. Lane Olinghouse of Everett, Sylvania, Georgia; H. Kovacs Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia; Mary Ellen Kimsey of Pueblo, Colorado; Randall J. Covill of Atkinson, New Hampshire; David Bart of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Elizabeth W. Vinyard of Placentia, California; and E. Beachy of Dayton, Ohio.

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## REFLECTIVE WITNESS by Pat Popelier

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"Look, officer, I'm telling you I saw the whole robbery. I was standing in front of the gift shop taking a picture of the display. I do windows for a living, and I'm always alert to new ideas. Liked the mirror in this one."

"Yeah, yeah, we've heard all that before. Two men, a blue station wagon, possible luggage carrier, license 3900I, heading east. So you were a good citizen and tried to help the police. So that was yesterday. Your lead was a dead end. So why'd you come back?" The sergeant was impatient and frustrated.

"'Cause this time I brought the picture I took. Proof!"

The sergeant took the photo reluctantly; almost returned it after a passing glance. Then he saw a blue car in the picture.

"Jim!" He summoned another man. "Take this to the lab. I want it blown up—fast!"

Half an hour and three cups of coffee later, the man called Jim had delivered the blowups and Sarge was back on the phone, a new intensity in his voice. "You heard me! A blue station wagon, *no* luggage carrier, license I00PE, headed *west*." As he put down the phone, he mumbled something about the damn mirror.

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**NEW "HOT" NAMES DAILY!** First Order "TRIPLED FREE!" SAMEDAY SHIPMENT! Computerized Adhesive Labels. Eager Opportunity Seekers. 200/\$8; 500/\$14; 1,000/\$25; 2,000/\$39; 5,000/\$75; 10,000/\$139. Other Lists Available. LIST-MASTERS, Box 425-NP, Mt. Sinai, NY 11766. Visa/MC/COD orders call 800-356-8664.

# Classified Continued

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## MAILING LISTS—Cont'd

ACTIVE NEW OPPORTUNIST NAMES! GUARANTEED! FAST DELIVERY! MIXED STATES! 200/\$10; 500/\$15; 1000/\$25. Dealer's Co-Op, Box 526-I, Griffith, IN 46319. 1-800-992-9405.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-0015.

\$2000 Monthly Possible, Assembling Products. Write: Or Call Amazing Recording 908-506-0600, Homeworker, POBX 5348-DP, Toms River, NJ 08753.

\$1000s Weekly Processing Mail From Home! Send Three First Class Stamps. Blumes, Box 5938, Richardson, TX 75083.

"A No-nonsense Way to \$500 A Day!" \$1 + Self-Addressed stamped envelope. Lourdes Bigo, 798 East 51 Street, Brooklyn, NY 11203.

EARN PROFITS! A revolutionary home-mailing program! Send a Sase to Miss Laurie Zertuche, 814 Pleasanton RD. #203, San Antonio, Texas 78214.

GUARANTEED. Earn Extra income. Start your own business. Send \$1 to Mark Honrine, 5491 Windflower Drive, Livermore, California 94550.

HOME ASSEMBLY WORK Available! Guaranteed Easy Money! Free Details! Homework-IO, Box 520, Danville, NH 03819.

"JANITORIAL BUSINESS MONEYMAKING SECRETS."—Free Business Report! Make \$25,000-\$100,000+ annually! Box 1087D, Valley Center, CA 92082.

MAKE \$2,000 per 1,000 Envelopes Stuffed. Rush Sase to: Success, 5932 West Bell, D106-1, Glendale, AZ 85308.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

\$1,000'S WEEKLY possible processing mail! Start immediately! FREE supplies/postage! Rush stamped envelope! MLC, Box 3559-ZM, Danbury, CT 06813.

EARN UP TO \$349.83 Per Week Assembling Our Products At Home. Amazing Recorded Message Reveals Details. Call Today! 316-421-0255, Ext. 25.

MAKE Rubber Stamps. Highly Profitable. Free details. STAMPER, POB 22809 (BC2), Tampa, FL 33622.

TEXAS INCOME "BIG OPPORTUNITY." RECEIVE \$10.00 FOR TRYING NEW MONEYMAKING PROGRAM. \$100K YEARLY. \$2.00 FEE. TEXAS INCOME, P.O. BOX 6852, CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78466-6852.

HOME Mailing \$1.00 Plus 50% Commissions. Free Postage, Supplies! USA and Canada. \$2.00: Caputo, A3, 118 Wexford Rd., Brampton, Ontario L6Z 2T5 Canada.

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificate worth \$5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send \$3.95 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

DYNAMIC new multi-level Marketing Program produces proven unlimited income potential! Join the ultimate Money Machine and achieve Financial Independence! Send for free information: Hutchinson, 2335 Lemonds Rd. SE, Social Circle, GA 30279.

BEST money-making opportunities of the 90's, are revealed and evaluated for you. \$1.00 Sase: Irene Gunther, RR 3, Dowagiac, MI 49047.

HOW to Profit from Auctions. Details: Auctions, 5025 47th Street, Drayton Valley, Alberta, Canada T0E 0M0.

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MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

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## PERSONAL

PEARLS Of The Orient Want To Write You. Details, Photos FREE, VIDEOS AVAILABLE. (#1 In Service Since 1979.) PAL, Blanca, CO 81123-0051. (719) 379-3228.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American — Mexican — Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 91912-1716.

NICE SINGLES with Christian values wish to meet others. FREE magazine. Send age, interests. Singles, P.O. Box 310-IO, Allardt, TN 38504.

LOVELY, young marriage-minded Asian women seek correspondence/marriage. Not just another penpal club—introduction is our business. Send or call for brochure: International Connections, P.O. Box 5828, Bellingham, WA 98227; (206) 734-5254 anytime.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE GENTLEMEN seek American ladies & gentlemen for Friendship/Romance/Marriage! Free details: English Rose Agency, 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, England. Tel: 01144-843-290735.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

## PERSONAL—Cont'd

ASIAN WOMEN desire friendship, marriage! Free details, photos! SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE, Box 5500-HF, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii 96745. (808) 325-7707.

PENFRIENDS-ENGLAND-USA. Make lasting friendships. Send age, interests. Free reply. Harmony, Box 82295HK, Phoenix, Arizona 85071.

## RECIPES

PAULA'S Penny Powwow's Best Collection. Send \$3.50 & Sase to: P.O. Box 927, Avondale, PA 19311.

THREE old fashioned recipes from Granny's tablet. \$3.00 Sase to: Granny, PO Box 1168, Morrisville, PA 19067-0312.

QUICK, Easy, Delicious! Dorothy's Corn Spoon Bread. Great for potlucks. \$2.00 Sase: JER Enterprises, P.O. Box 96, Pinole, CA 94564.

## SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

## TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

## For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

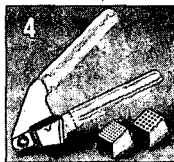
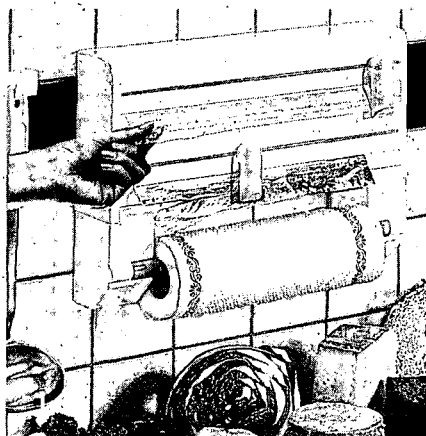
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

# MAIL \* ORDER \* MALL

## ▼ PERFECT KITCHEN ROLL DISPENSER AND 3 PIECE KITCHEN TOOL KIT

**D**o kitchen wraps have you all thumbs? Then THE Perfect Kitchen Dispenser is for you. It's the only one that, cut after cut, holds the roll end ready to be picked up and pulled out for the next sheet. The two "neat sheet" cutters feature stainless steel blades for cutting that's a cinch. Holds standard rolls of cling-film, aluminum foil, or wax paper plus a paper towel holder. Simple front loading procedure makes replacement a snap. Sleek white and grey design fits any decor. But there's more: it comes with state of the art hand can opener, super strong jar and bottle opener, and impressive garlic/onion press with 2 inserts for fine and coarse pressing. So get a handle on kitchen wraps and treat yourself.

**\$69.98** (\$8.50) #A1954.

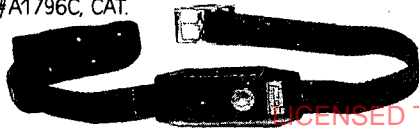


1. DISPENSER
2. HAND CAN OPENER
3. JAR AND BOTTLE OPENER
4. GARLIC/ONION PRESS

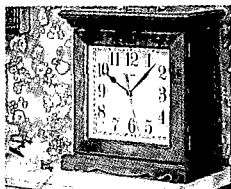
## ▼ DO FLEAS HAVE EARS?

**T**he Microtech Flea Collar with its blasts of ultrasound creates such an intolerable environment that fleas and ticks abandon their pet hosts within 5 days. It is designed specifically for fleas and focuses on a 4' zone of protection, the Microtech Collar outperforms other kinds of ultrasonic pest chasers. A vast improvement over poison powders and chemical collars. Works on cats or dogs. Adjustable 19" collar fits 97% of dogs and runs for 6-8 months on 2 lithium cells (included). You can afford to see if it *really* works because you are fully protected by our guarantee — you have nothing to lose but the fleas!

**\$44.98** (\$3.00) #A1796, DOG; **\$44.98** (\$3.00) #A1796C, CAT.

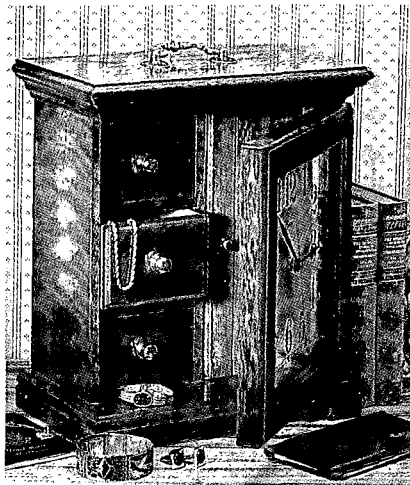


## ▼ A TIMELY SECRET

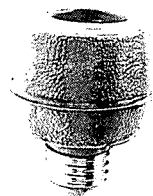


Do you have valuables or other important items that need a secure and secret hiding place? Why not store them in an elegant 17<sup>th</sup>

century reproduction of a mantelpiece clock! Handcrafted in cherry, and accented with solid brass, the clock has large antique style numbers and features a quartz powered movement. This lovely accent piece measures 13" (h) x 11¼" (w) x 6½" (d) and will grace any dresser, desk or mantel. The clock face opens to reveal 3 fabric lined drawers and a larger (10" x 4" x 3¾"), compartment, complete with key. Beauty and security in one lovely piece—what a timely idea! **\$99.98** (\$8.00) #A1917.

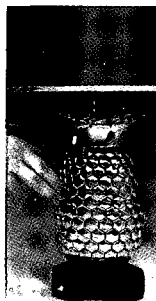


## ▼ TEACH AN OLD LAMP NEW TRICKS

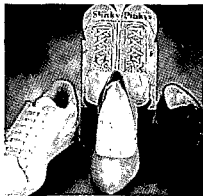


Any lamp that takes a standard bulb can be updated with the Touchtronic dimmer. No rewiring needed—just screw into lamp socket. Then your touch on any metal part becomes the "switch"—touch once for low light, again for medium, a third time for full wattage. Handy when you're entering a dark room, great at bedside and a real comfort to the arthritic or the ill. You'll save time, money and electricity—no

more 3-way bulbs to buy and you pay for only as much light as you need. UL listed; one-year factory warranty. **\$15.98** (\$4.00) #A1700. 2 for **\$27.98** (\$6.00) #A17002.



## ▼ FRESHENED FOOTWEAR



Just put a Stinky Pinky "sock" in each shoe and overnight odor is gone, absorbed by the special blend of all natural earth materials. Works in running

shoes, sneakers, boots, leather shoes, anything that goes on your feet. And keeps on working, too—just put Stinky Pinkys out in the sun for a day every three months or so to restore their odor-catching ability. Three pairs of Stinky Pinkys, enough for 6 shoes or boots, costs **\$19.98** (\$4.00) #13263.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 051 HK, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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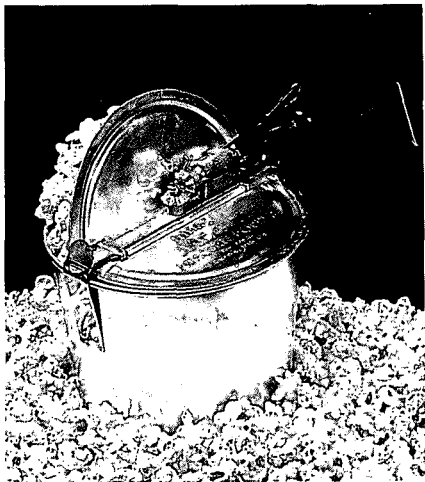
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# MAIL ☆ ORDER ☆ MALL

## ▽ GOURMET POPCORN POPPER



All new high temperature 6 qt. popcorn popper. Most electric and hot-air poppers "puff" the corn more than they "pop" it, leaving it tough with hard centers. This flat-bottomed stove-top popper reaches 475° and pops full in two minutes with 6 quarts of the best popcorn you ever tasted. Stirring paddle with through-the-crank handle virtually eliminates burnt or unpopped kernels. Wooden handle for safe grip, two dump lids. Pop without oil for delicious diet popcorn. 370 calories per 4 qt. bowl. Produce tender, fluffy, old fashioned movie theater popcorn with the Detonator™ popper. Made in the USA. **\$24.98** (\$5.00) #A1950.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 051 HK, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, COD orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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## ▽ FOR THE BIRDS

A super feeding system that really is "for the birds". The Meta Wild Bird Feeder™ has a unique tri-level perch design, that encourages different species to feed together. It is easy to fill and provides a total of 30 inches of feeding space and holds 2½ quarts of seed in six individual feeding stations, so different seed mixes can be used to attract different species of birds. The feeder features 2-way optical quality mirror panels that lets you watch from just inches away, while the birds feed undisturbed. Constructed of durable and attractive Lexan®, the feeder is easy to clean, even in the dishwasher. The Meta Feeder™ measures 26"x14"x5", comes fully assembled and mounts easily to any window. Plus, it comes with a lifetime warranty. So, get in on the biggest hobby in the U.S. and "feed the birds". **\$79.98** (\$10.00) #A1946.



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